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BERGEN STUDIES ON THE MIDDLE EAST AND AFRICA

The Idrīsī State in ʿAsīr  
1906-1934

Politics, religion and personal  
prestige as statebuilding factors  
in early twentieth-century Arabia

Anne K. Bang

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## PREFACE

This book is based on my Hovudfag thesis from the University of Bergen in 1994. In the work with this thesis I benefited from the help and support from many individuals who all deserve credit and thanks.

First of all, I am grateful to the director of the Centre for Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies at the University of Bergen, Ole Morten V. Vikør, for letting me use the facilities of the Centre in the course of my work.

I also thank all those who has worked at the Centre in this period for sharing with me valuable information and advice. Special thanks goes to Dr ʿAlī Ṣāliḥ Karrār for guiding me through the family lines of the Adārīsa and for making available material from the National Records Office in Khartoum.

I offer a special gratitude to Professor John O. Hunwick who stayed at the Centre as a visiting scholar in the year 1993-94. In weekly seminars he has guided me through the many difficulties of the Arabic language, and it is due to his help that the ancient *Ḥayāt* source can appear in translation in this book.

Last, but not least, I thank my supervisor, Professor Rex Bryner for providing me with information, advice and encouragement throughout this work, and for careful reading of the manuscript.

Bergen, October 1996

ANNE K. BANG



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# 1

## INTRODUCTION

### *The scope of the study*

The subject of this book is a small, short-lived state formation on the Yemeni Red Sea coast in the period 1906-1934. The Idrīsī state of 'Ashr was set up by Muḥammad al-Idrīsī, a great-grandson of the well-known nineteenth-century Sufi teacher Aḥmad b. Idrīs, and its very existence presents a remarkable case of political activism originating from within a Sufi framework.

The purpose of the book is twofold. Its first aim is to present a history of the Idrīsī state—from its origins to its final collapse. Thus, the primary objective of this study is to present the history of a essentially *political* entity—a state in the period around the First World War.

The second objective is to point to factors which led to the rise of the Idrīsī state, and to those which led to its downfall. In order for such a study to be fruitful, it is necessary first to make a categorization of the factors that will be discussed. In the case of the Idrīsī state, it is possible to identify three sets of factors which played a part in shaping its history.

Firstly, the history of a political entity is evidently shaped by global factors and events. In the case of the Idrīsī state, both local regional and international factors played a role in its brief history. For this reason, it is necessary to investigate the history of the Idrīsī state against the background of the political history of Yemen and the general political scene of the period.

Secondly, in order to legitimize its existence, a state must be based on a certain ideological foundation. In the Muslim world, state formation has historically tended to be linked to the religion of Islam. The Idrīsī state, like many of the contemporary state formations on the Arabian Peninsula, arose out of a particular religious heritage or system. What is extraordinary about the

Idrīsī state is that its founder came from a particular Sufi tradition, rather than from a sect or subdivision of Islam. Thus, the history of the Idrīsī state and of the religious heritage which constituted its basis, is also the history of this Sufi tradition and specifically the possible preconditions for political activism embodied in it.

Thirdly, in order to attain leadership, a potential ruler will have to rely, in addition to the ideological aspect, on his own charisma and prestige. This is what we may call the personal factor which plays a role in the history of the Idrīsī state. Muḥammad al-Idrīsī claimed his position as a political leader with reference to his noble descent and the prestigious position of his family. Thus, the history of the Idrīsī state is also the history of the Idrīsī family in ʿAsīr, and their position in the wider Idrīsī network and the Muslim world as a whole.

### *The framework*

The thesis that is the basis for this book was conceived of within the framework of an ongoing series of Sufi studies at the University of Bergen, focusing on the so-called 'Neo-Sufi' orders of the nineteenth century. This research has resulted in several works, particularly on the orders derived from the influential Sufi teacher Aḥmad b. Idrīs of Morocco.<sup>1</sup>

The present work deals less with Sufism as such, and more with political activism in a turbulent phase of world history. Neo-Sufi orders have in many instances played important roles in modern history; best known is probably the Sanūsiyya of North Africa which led the resistance against European encroachment in the Sahara. In these instances a religious structure (the brotherhood) is transformed into a political one; the Sufi order turns into a movement that has been described as proto-nationalist in

1 R.S. O'Fahey, *Enigmatic Saint. Ahmad Ibn Idris and the Idrisi Tradition*, London 1990; ʿAlī Šāliḥ Karrār, *The Sufi Brotherhoods in the Sudan*, London 1992; Einar Thomassen and Bernd Radtke (eds.), *The Letters of Aḥmad Ibn Idrīs*, London 1993 and Knut S. Vikør, *Sufi and Scholar on the Desert Edge. Muḥammad b. ʿAlī al-Sanūsī and his Brotherhood*, London 1995.

There are many similarities between the Sanūsiyya of North Africa and the Idrīsī state of ʿAsīr. Yet, there are also fundamental differences, and it is precisely these differences which constitute the basic assumption behind this study. The Sanūsiyya was a tightly organised, hierarchical religious order *before* it turned into a resistance movement; before the organisation took on political functions. In contrast, the Adārīsa of ʿAsīr in the nineteenth century never established any organisation;<sup>2</sup> there was no group (order) and no defined hierarchy, no widespread presence in agricultural communities comparable to those of the Sanūsiyya. Consequently, Idrīsī activism in early twentieth-century ʿAsīr was not a case where an already established religious order took up resistance against the Ottomans, instead the movement was formed there and then, in the course of approximately five years (1907-12). The result was not a Sufi leadership, but a broad alliance based on specific mutual interests: a religious political movement resembling more the contemporary movements of today than the Sanūsiyya. As a consequence of the above assumption—that the Idrīsī movement in ʿAsīr was distinct from the start a political and not a religious one—this study will seek to identify the factors contributing to the rise and fall of the Idrīsī state in ʿAsīr.

One basic assumption that Muḥammad al-Idrīsī operated under in the Sufi paradigm is only partly satisfactory. It does not explain why the Idrīsī family, and not any other influential ʿAsīr lineage, rose to political leadership in ʿAsīr. In this context one must take into account two aspects of the heritage of the Idrīsī tradition—its teachings and the considerable prestige it enjoyed in the Muslim world.

The teachings of Ahmad b. Idrīs (as well as those of other nineteenth-century Sufis such as Aḥmad al-Tijānī) have often

<sup>2</sup> I must stress, the term *Adārīsa* (the plural of Idrīsī) is used to refer to the descendants of Ibn Idrīs, without implying anything about a specific lineage or *ṭarīqa*. This should not be confused with the term *ṭarīqa* which refers to various *ṭarīqas* founded after the death of Ibn Idrīs, and transmitted by his descendants. This is consistent with the term *ṭarīqa* as employed by O'Fahey in *Enigmatic Saint*, see pp. 10-11.

been said to contain some sort of precondition towards political activism, and that they in this sense represented a break with earlier Sufi tradition. This assumption stems largely from the explicit activism of the Idrīsī-derived orders, but the alleged link between teachings and action is not wholly clear. In the case of the Idrīsī state, it may be argued that after two generations of quietism (in the time of the son and grandson of Ibn Idrīs), there came a leader who was willing and able to put into practice the activism embodied in the tradition. Because of this argument, an account of the political activism of Muḥammad al-Idrīsī must consider the heritage of which he was a part in order to establish the basis of his activism.

Lineage and personal descent has always been important in the Islamic world, and more often than not, the prestige linked to descent has had religious connotations, thus often within Sufism. This is the case with the Adārisa family of ʿAsīr, who were bound to enjoy considerable prestige due to their ancestor's status as religious reformer, Sufi shaykh or even saint (in addition comes the Idrīsīs widely-acknowledged status as *ashrāf* (descendants of the Prophet)). In order to examine the rise to political leadership by a descendant of Ibn Idrīs, one must consider the prestige of the family from which he sprang. It will also be evident, when we examine the history of the Adārisa of ʿAsīr, that they maintained continuous contact with their relatives on the opposite side of the Red Sea. On the basis of this, I have chosen to focus also on the history of the Idrīsī family before the times of Muḥammad al-Idrīsī to seek the factors which made Idrīsī leadership in ʿAsīr possible.

### *The sources*

There is no immediate lack of sources concerning the Idrīsī state of ʿAsīr. We possess enough primary sources to create a quite detailed picture of the history of the state, both in Arabic and European languages. As for nineteenth-century ʿAsīr, there exist some primary accounts written by British observers and secondary literature by Arab scholars, but none of these provide any information on the two generations after the great shaykh,

Aḥmad b. Idrīs. Such information could perhaps be obtained from documents now in possession of the Adārisa of Luxor in Egypt, but for the present work, these have not been consulted. On the general history of the Idrīsī tradition, its founder and spreading, I have mainly consulted secondary literature, both from within and outside the Bergen environment.

### *Sources concerning 'Asīr in the nineteenth century*

The most detailed history of the first half of the nineteenth century in 'Asīr, is that of Captain R.L. Playfair, *A history of Arabia Felix or Yemen*.<sup>3</sup> First published in 1859, it presents a year-by-year account of the various events taking place in the Yemen. It is thus valuable as a factual reference book, and is used by most later European historians concerned with the Yemen. Playfair served as the first assistant political resident at Aden, and his reports can be described as quite well-informed, in the sense that they convey the actual events as well as British reactions. In this regard, Playfair's account also provides us with useful information about the new power factor in Arabia, namely the British colony of Aden. However, this book tends to focus on details and does not place the events in a wider context. Dates given by Playfair are generally reliable, more so as the narrative approaches the time of writing. As with all colonial literature, it is necessary to bear in mind the times it describes, as well as the context in which it was written.

A thorough history of the Turkish occupation of the Yemen is written in English by the Sa'ūdī scholar Muḥammad A. al-Zulfa, based on both Ottoman, Egyptian and British archival sources, in addition to manuscripts and private collections from 'Asīr.<sup>4</sup> Although more distant in time, it must be considered geographically and culturally closer to its subject than Playfair's account, and at any rate it is much better documented, given the exhaustive use of archival sources. Al-Zulfa's thesis focuses on

<sup>3</sup> R.L. Playfair, *A history of Arabia Felix ar Yemen*, Bombay 1859, reprinted Amsterdam: Ad Orientem 1970.

<sup>4</sup> Muḥammad A. al-Zulfa, *Ottoman relations with 'Asīr and the surrounding areas 1840-1872*, Ph.D. thesis, University of Cambridge 1987.

Ottoman policies, and thus places the history of ʿAsīr within the framework of the Ottoman empire. In this regard this work is a useful corrective to Playfair's British-oriented account.

Colonial literature of somewhat later date (1915-23) may be useful for completing the picture of ʿAsīr under Turkish occupation in the latter half of the nineteenth century. I have used two such works; *Arabia Infelix or the Turks in Yamen* by G. Wyman Bury<sup>5</sup> and *Kings of Arabia* by Harold F. Jacobs.<sup>6</sup> Both authors were connected to the British administration in Aden and their accounts are not of a really scholarly nature. Dates and references to events must be treated with scepticism—in many instances they are wrong. Nevertheless I have included references from these works, insofar as they provide interesting, or at least anecdotal information.

In Arabic, there exists an undated history of ʿAsīr, *Taʾrīkh ʿAsīr*, by Hāshim b. Saʿīd al-Nuʿmī, a *qāḍī* of the Rijāl al-Māʿ.<sup>7</sup> This book focuses on the various tribal fractions involved in the turbulence in ʿAsīr. I have mainly used the work to cross-check dates from European sources.

### *Sources concerning the Idrīsī state in the twentieth century*

There are quite a number of contemporary sources, both English and Arabic, concerning the Idrīsī state, deriving from the state itself or accounts of southwest Arabia in general. The material available to us is of varied importance and quality, and the following is an assessment of the main sources used in the present book.

### *Contemporary Arabic and European Sources*

Some of the writings of Muḥammad al-Idrīsī are reproduced in a detailed history of the Yemeni coastal area by Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-ʿAqīlī; *Taʾrīkh al-Mikhlāf al-Sulaymānī*.<sup>8</sup> Parts of the

5 G. Wyman Bury, *Arabia Infelix of the Turks in Yamen*, London 1915.

6 Harold F. Jacobs, *Kings of Arabia*, London 1923.

7 Hāshim b. Saʿīd al-Nuʿmī, *Taʾrīkh ʿAsīr*, n.p. (Riyad?): Printing and Press Publication Corp n.d.

8 Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-ʿAqīlī, *Taʾrīkh al-Mikhlāf al-Sulaymānī*, II, 2nd revised edn, Riyad 1982. I am grateful to Dr Yaḥyā Ibrāhīm at the

reproduced material are letters, sent by al-Idrīsī to ‘Asīrī shaykhs concerning various matters. There are also longer pieces of writing which may give insight into the political thinking—and the style of rhetoric—of Muḥammad al-Idrīsī. One of his writings may be considered of special importance, since it gives a firsthand account of the early days of the Idrīsī movement and its conflicts with the Ottomans. It is also an interesting document in its own right, since it is an attempt to justify the uprising against the Ottomans and in so doing makes use of an interesting mixture of old and modern arguments. This letter, a *bayān*, or announcement, is reproduced with a translation as an appendix to this book.<sup>9</sup>

In European languages, most primary information stems from reports to and from the British resident at Aden, the Foreign Office and the India Administration. These documents are preserved in the Public Records Office in London, and have been investigated by John Baldry in a series of articles.<sup>10</sup> Although his work has not focused on the Idrīsī state as such, his research has brought to light and documented most important aspects of Anglo-Idrīsī relations as well as the complex imperialist motives behind Anglo-Italian rivalry in ‘Asīr.

The two above-mentioned works by G. Wyman Bury and H.F. Jacobs are both contemporary works which give additional insight into the history of the Idrīsī state, and to British reactions to the activities of Muḥammad al-Idrīsī. But, the fact that these are contemporary reports, gives additional reasons to exercise caution with regard to bias, especially when it comes to the period of the First World War. Neither of the two accounts are

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National Records Office in Khartoum for making available a copy of this very useful book.

- 9) Muḥammad al-Idrīsī, *Bayān li'l-nās wa-hudā wa-maw‘iẓa li'l-muttaqīn*, Cairo 1912.
- 10) John Baldry, 'Anglo-Italian rivalry in Yemen and ‘Asīr 1900-1934', *Die Welt des Islams*, xvii, 1-4, 1976-77, 156-93; 'The power and mineral concessions of the Idrīsī Imamate of ‘Asīr 1910-1929', *Arabian Studies*, ii, 1976, 76-103; 'The Turkish-Italian War in the Yemen 1911-1912', *Arabian Studies*, iii, 1976, 51-65; 'Al-Yaman and the Turkish occupation 1849-1914', *Arabica*, 23/2, 1976, 156-96; 'Imām Yahya and the Yamani uprising of 1904-07', *‘Abr Nahrain*, xviii.



written by disinterested scholars.

The First World War led to British investigations in Arabia in order to assess the possibility of recruiting Arab allies against the Ottoman Empire. One result of these investigations is *Asir before World War I. Asir Handbook*, prepared for the Arab Bureau in Cairo by Sir Arthur Kinnahan Cornwallis.<sup>11</sup> This is a detailed report on the state of affairs in 'Asir, including notes on tribal loyalties and prominent personalities. The book is by its nature factual; little attempt is made to go beyond mere description.

The need for surveillance and understanding of the Arabian Peninsula also resulted in a German work, *Der Kampf um Arabien zwischen der Türkei und England* by Franz Stuhlmann.<sup>12</sup> Although written with a strong pro-Ottoman tendency, it is a detailed piece of contemporary history, and a corrective to the bias of British sources.

As to developments in 'Asir in the 1920s, we have reports by the Syrian-American Amin Rihani.<sup>13</sup> He travelled extensively in Southwest Arabia in this period and met with the contenders in the Arab rivalry that followed the First World War. His works are more travel literature than political analysis, and facts and evaluations should be treated with care. Nevertheless, it is still useful for the creation of a more complete picture of the Idrīṣī state, its founder and its people.

The final years of the Idrīṣī state are outlined in a series of surveys by Arnold J. Toynbee.<sup>14</sup> These are descriptions of political developments in the Arabian Peninsula, based on contemporary journals and periodicals. Thus, the surveys can be seen as a summary of contemporary surveillance and comments

11 Arthur Kinnahan Cornwallis, *Asir before World War I. Asir handbook*, prepared 1916, reprinted New York-Cambridge 1976.

12 Franz Stuhlmann, *Der Kampf um Arabien zwischen der Türkei und England*, Hamburgische Forschungen, Erstes Heft, Hamburg: Verlag George Westermann 1916.

13 Amin Rihani, *Around the coasts of Arabia*, London 1930. There is also a report to the American Consul in Aden on the Yemen and 'Asir included in R.W. Sinclair (ed.), *Documents on the History of South West Arabia*, Salisbury, NC 1976, 1. From internal evidence and style it is clear that the report is written by Amin Rihani.

14 Arnold J. Toynbee, *Survey of International Affairs, 1, 1925*, London 1927; *Survey of International Affairs, 1928*, London 1929.

and are useful for establishing chronology.

### *Other sources*

The book by al-<sup>ʿ</sup>Aqīlī mentioned above also contains an exhaustive history on <sup>ʿ</sup>Asīr in the early twentieth century, with a very detailed description of the tribal divisions in the region and their various political loyalties. In the search for factual information about the Idrīsī state, al-<sup>ʿ</sup>Aqīlī's work is the most useful reference, although it is not clear where he gets his information from; the edition available to me does not contain systematic references. However, dates or specific events referred to by al-<sup>ʿ</sup>Aqīlī are in the majority of cases confirmed by other sources. On the other hand, his work has been criticised for having an explicit pro-Sa<sup>ʿ</sup>ūdī tendency.<sup>15</sup> Taking heed of this criticism, I have tried to avoid relying too heavily on al-<sup>ʿ</sup>Aqīlī when examining Sa<sup>ʿ</sup>ūdī-Idrīsī relations.

A history of Sa<sup>ʿ</sup>ūdī expansionist ambitions in the Yemen is written by Muḥammad <sup>ʿ</sup>Alī al-Shahhārī.<sup>16</sup> The sections concerning <sup>ʿ</sup>Asīr relies heavily on al-<sup>ʿ</sup>Aqīlī, but al-Shahhārī also draws on newspapers and periodicals. This makes it a useful addition and corrective to al-<sup>ʿ</sup>Aqīlī.

Apart from the private archives of the Adārisa, there are other primary sources which have not been used for this study, and which may be sources for future research. First of all, there is the Ottoman material, which quite possibly could have provided very useful information and a whole new angle to the work. The same is true for Italian archival material which may give more detailed insight into the nature of Italian-Idrīsī relations. Thirdly, I have not consulted contemporary newspapers which may contain opinions given by parties other than those directly involved—particularly around the time when the Idrīsīs joined Britain in the First World War. Extensive research including the above-mentioned sources would no doubt change and refine much of what is written here.

15 Reissner makes this criticism in his article 'Die Idrīsiden in <sup>ʿ</sup>Asīr. Ein historischer Überblick', *Die Welt des Islams*, xxi, 1981, 24.

16 Muḥammad <sup>ʿ</sup>Alī al-Shahhārī, *al-Muḥāmi<sup>ʿ</sup> al-tawassu<sup>ʿ</sup>iyya al-Sa<sup>ʿ</sup>ūdiyya fī 'l-Yaman*, Beirut 1979.



*Hijāz and ʿAsīr*

## 2

### ‘ASĪR: ARENA OF CONFLICT

The Idrīsī state that arose in ‘Asīr in 1906-26 may be seen as a continuation of a long-standing political turbulence in the region. Thus, in order to analyze the background of this state, it is necessary to clarify the events that preceded its foundation.

#### *‘Asīr before the 1830s*

The region ‘Asīr lies on the Red Sea coast, directly north of the Yemeni-Sa‘ūdī border and is today a province of the kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The area consists of two distinct geographical regions; the flat coastal plains and steep mountains in the interior.

The coastal region is called Tihāmat ‘Asīr or al-Tihāma. The littoral is sometimes referred to as al-Mikhlāf al-Sulaymānī, or only al-Mikhlāf. The plain continues further southwards, where it has been referred to as Tihāmat al-Yaman or al-Mikhlāf al-Yamanī. In what follows, twentieth-century usage will be adopted; the Tihāma will refer to the coastal plain as opposed to the mountain regions. Tihāmat ‘Asīr will mean the lowlands below the ‘Asīrī mountains, while Tihāmat al-Yaman will refer to the littoral below the Yemeni mountains.<sup>1</sup>

The mountains inland of the Tihāmat ‘Asīr has been referred to as ‘Asīr al-Sarāh (‘‘Asīr of the mountain’), the name ‘Asīr originating from a confederation of highland tribes with their

<sup>1</sup> The actual division between Tihāmat ‘Asīr and Tihāmat al-Yaman is an artificial one from a geographical point of view. The reason for creating such a division is to make a distinction between the Yemen proper, that is the territory claimed by the imam of Ṣan‘ā‘, and the coastal regions of ‘Asīr which has been claimed by several rulers.

centre in the highland capital of Abhā. Thus, to apply the term 'Asīr for the entire region, both highlands and lowlands, is not wholly correct.<sup>2</sup>

From the earliest times, 'Asīr has been regarded as part of the Yemen and the region's history is closely intertwined with that of the latter. Thus, older chronicles and accounts will include 'Asīr when referring to the Yemen, or as the Romans termed it, Arabia Felix.<sup>3</sup>

From the beginning of the Islamic period, we learn that the Prophet sent his son-in-law 'Alī to convert the Yemeni population, all of whom, according to tradition, embraced Islam in one day. From this derives the many *ḥadīths* about *faḍā'il al-Yaman*, which praise the land and its people.

In the sixteenth century the Mamluk sultan of Egypt occupied the Yemen to counter the increasing Portuguese naval activity in the Red Sea. Two years later the Ottomans took over from the Egyptians and installed a Turkish Pasha.<sup>4</sup> The new *vilayet* (province) did not yield much income to the sultan; rather it became an increasing expense to the Porte. The Turks evacuated it in 1636 and the Yemen was left to be ruled by the Zaydī imams of Ṣan'ā'.<sup>5</sup> This city was the imams' power centre, and throughout the seventeenth century the Imāmate dynasty ruled all of the Yemen, including 'Asīr.

In the early eighteenth century the power of the imams ebbed and several local chiefs took the opportunity to make themselves

2 However, for practical purposes, this is what I will do. 'Asīr thereby means the entire region directly north of the Yemen, as opposed to the Yemen proper.

3 A detailed history of the Yemen from the beginning of the Christian era to the mid-nineteenth century is that by Playfair, *History of Arabia Felix*. For the nineteenth century, overviews are given by al-Zulfa, *Ottoman relations* and Reissner, 'Die Idrisiden in 'Asīr', 164-92. Other useful references for the history of 'Asīr are: E. Macro, *Yemen and the Western World*, London 1968 and Stuhlmann, *Der Kampf um Arabien*, as well as Baldry, 'Al-Yaman and the Turkish occupation'.

4 Baldry, 'Al-Yaman and the Turkish occupation', 158.

5 Zaydī Islam, or so-called 'Fiver' Shi'ism, recognizes the grandson of Husayn as *imām*. Zaydī doctrine does not insist on an unbroken lineage; any descendant of 'Alī who has the ability can be *imām*.

independent. One of them was the *sharīf* of Abū ‘Arīsh who declared his independence from Ṣan‘ā’ in 1730.<sup>6</sup> In the following years the Sharīfian dynasty extended their authority. When the Danish expedition led by Carsten Niebuhr arrived in Arabia in 1763, they found the *sharīf* of Abū ‘Arīsh in control of the Tihāma from al-Qunfudha in the north to al-Luḥayya in the south.<sup>7</sup>

In the latter half of the eighteenth century, the message of the Wahhābīs spread to the Yemen and found resonance especially among the highland tribes of ‘Asīr, that is, in ‘Asīr al-Sarāh. These tribes had hitherto been more or less separate units, paying allegiance only to their own leader. Now Wahhābī ideology provided a basis for unification. The highland Rufayda tribe, led by Muḥammad b. ‘Āmir, nicknamed Abū Nuqṭa, rose to supremacy and conquered Abhā in 1798-9 with the help of Wahhābī supporters. Abū Nuqṭa then assumed the title ‘*amīr* of ‘Asīr al-Sarāh’. After gaining control of the mountain regions he turned to the Tihāma, backed by the military support of the Sa‘ūdī prince, ‘Abd al-‘Azīz.<sup>8</sup>

In the Tihāma, the *sharīf* of Abū ‘Arīsh, *sharīf* Ḥummūd b. Muḥammad, known as Abū Mismār,<sup>9</sup> saw the threat coming

6 The *ashrāf* of Abū ‘Arīsh migrated from Mecca in the mid-seventeenth century, and were permitted by the imam to settle at Abū ‘Arīsh. The first generation to settle was headed by Khayrāt b. Shabīr, who harboured ambitions to establish an independant *sharīfate*. This he did not accomplish, but in 1730, his grandson Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. Khayrāt took advantage of the imamate’s weakness and staged a revolt shortly after being appointed governor of Abū ‘Arīsh; al-Zulfa, *Ottoman relations*, 31.

7 Niebuhr notes, ‘The principality of Abu Arisch, which is also named after its capital, is properly a part of Tehama. It stretches along the Arabic Gulph, northward from Loheya, for the space of two degrees’ and: ‘This country was, not long since, within the Imams dominions’; Carsten Niebuhr, *Travels in Arabia and other countries in the East*, trans. Robert Heron, Edinburgh 1792; reprint Beirut: Librairie du Liban n.d., 53-4.

8 The ensuing events, the rivalry between Abū Nuqṭa and Abū Mismār and the Turco-Egyptian field expeditions in ‘Asīr, are reported by Playfair, *History*, 127-43 and al-Zulfa, *Ottoman relations*, 30-8.

9 Assumed the *sharīfate* in 1801; al-Zulfa, *Ottoman relations*, 32 and al-Nu‘mī, *Ta’rīkh ‘Asīr*, 160-4.

from the mountains and tried to obtain support from his old overlord, the imam of Ṣanʿā'. In response he got only promises and in 1801-2 Abū Mismār suffered defeat against Abū Nuqṭa. Consequently, the *sharīf* was forced to acknowledge Saʿūdī overlordship and he was given title as a Saʿūdī governor. In this new capacity by 1803-4 he had extended his control of the Tihāma as far south as Zabīd, south of Bayt al-Faqīh.

The *sharīf* of Abu ʿArīsh had acknowledged Saʿūdī overlordship unwillingly. The population in the lowlands were less receptive to the Wahhābī call, possibly due to more frequent contact with the outside world through the ports along the coast. The *sharīf* of Abū ʿArīsh sought to rid himself of Wahhābī sovereignty and in 1809 he secretly reached an agreement with a son of the imam. According to this agreement the son, Aḥmad, would overthrow his father, which he did. Abū Mismār would then renounce his allegiance to Saʿūd and restore the revenues of the Tihāma to the imam. The Wahhābīs learned of the plan and an army was sent to burn and loot the coastal cities of al-Luḥayya and al-Ḥudayda. In the fighting the highland leader Abū Nuqṭa was killed, but Abū Mismār nevertheless suffered defeat by the Saʿūdī troops and was forced to renew his allegiance to the Wahhābīs who continued to exercise influence in the Tihāma.<sup>10</sup> Yet, their actual control of the coastal region weakened, and Abū Mismār could continue as virtually independent ruler.

In the years preceding 1813 the mountain regions of ʿAsīr remained a Wahhābī stronghold which was perceived as a threat by both the *sharīf* of Abū ʿArīsh and by the imam of Ṣanʿā'. When Muḥammad ʿAlī Pasha arrived in Mecca in 1813 he dispatched an envoy both to the *sharīf* and the imam with a request for support against the common enemy. According to Playfair, 'The Sharif gave an evasive answer at the time', whereas the imam 'expressed his perfect readiness to comply with the requisition'.<sup>11</sup>

The following year, in 1814, an Egyptian fleet arrived at al-Qunfudha, but was soon driven back by a band of Wahhābī fighters. The city was under Wahhābī control after having been

10 These events are reported by Playfair, *History*, 129.

11 *Ibid.*, 131.

occupied in 1804.<sup>12</sup> Muḥammad ‘Alī was apparently very determined to continue the expedition, to gain control of the reputed wealth and fertile lands of the Yemen. There were also some political motives present, as British troops had occupied the Perim island in the Bāb al-Mandab strait in 1799, as a response to Bonaparte’s invasion of Egypt in the previous year.

Muḥammad ‘Alī’s first attempts came to nothing, but in 1817-18 a new force arrived, led by his son, Ibrāhīm Pasha.<sup>13</sup> The Egyptians had in advance secured support from the imam who was pleased by the prospect of having the Yemeni coastal cities restored to him (principally al-Ḥudayda, the main port of Ṣan‘ā’, which had been within the territory of the *sharīf* of Abū ‘Arīsh). The Turco-Egyptians soon conquered the coastal towns, including Abū ‘Arīsh proper, and several places in the interior. According to the agreement, a large part of the *sharīf*’s territory was restored to the imam.

According to Stuhlmann, six Turco-Egyptian expeditions were sent into ‘Asīr in the period 1824-26 with the aim of bringing the entire region under control, but without success.<sup>14</sup>

In 1832 a dispute broke out in the Ḥijāz between the Egyptian Governor and the officers of the Egyptian army. The leader of the officers, Turkçe Bilméz, succeeded in overthrowing the governor and securing support from the Sublime Porte against the increasingly independent Muḥammad ‘Alī. Turkçe Bilméz was made governor of the Ḥijāz by the Porte and as such he set out to invade the Yemen from the north.<sup>15</sup> He landed in al-Qunfudha in 1832, and by November of that year he had conquered al-Ḥudayda, Zabīd and al-Mukhā, and thereby brought practically the entire Tihāma under his control.

Meanwhile, a new group had risen to power in the region. This was the Banū Mughayd, a tribe with Wahhābī sympathies

12 Macro, *Yemen and the Western World*, 21.

13 Ibrāhīm Pasha’s conquest of the Tihāma is described by al-Zulfa, *Ottoman relations*, 33 and Playfair, *History*, 133-4.

14 Stuhlmann, *Kampf um Arabien*, 69.

15 The events involving Turkçe Bilméz are narrated by Playfair, *History*, 141-4; Baldry, ‘Al-Yaman and the Turkish occupation’, 160-1 and al-Zulfa, *Ottoman relations*, 34.



led by a man named ʿAlī b. Mujaththil.<sup>16</sup>

In 1832 the Banū Mughayd allied themselves with Albanian mutineers of the Egyptian army and brought the surrounding tribes under their control. The Albanians were expelled by the Banū Mughayd in 1833 and Ibn Mujaththil, who styled himself *amīr* of ʿAsīr al-Sarāh, was left in control of most of the mountain regions of ʿAsīr, including Ṣabyā.

The imam of Ṣanʿāʾ was unable to challenge Turkçe Bilméz and Ibn Mujaththil seems to have been ambiguous in his attitude towards the Turkish presence.

Instead, it was Aḥmad Pasha of the Egyptian army who came to stop the Turkish expedition in the Yemen.<sup>17</sup> He arrived off the Yemeni coast with 15,000 men and prepared to attack Turkçe Bilméz in al-Mukhā. Upon hearing this, Ibn Mujaththil opted for the Egyptian side and marched towards al-Mukhā with 20,000 men. In early 1833 the city was invaded by the ʿAsīrīs and the Turks were driven out. Al-Mukhā was then plundered and looted for three days, whereupon the Egyptian Army took over. Ibn Mujaththil and his men then withdrew to the mountains.<sup>18</sup>

The battle at al-Mukhā meant a temporary end to Turco-Egyptian rivalry in the Yemen. The Egyptian army, under Aḥmad Pasha took control of all the coastal cities. By 1837, Muḥammad ʿAlī controlled the entire Red Sea coast, from Suez to the Bāb al-

16 Al-Nuʿmī, *Taʾrīkh ʿAsīr*, 175. ʿAlī b. Mujaththil's times are described pp. 175-85.

17 'An extraordinary meteoric shower, which took place at Mokha on the 13th of November, and lasted all night, caused great alarm to the inhabitants, and was considered by Turkchee Bilmas and his followers as an omen of evil; and by a curious coincidence their forbodings were realised, and from this date the star of the daring rebel seemed to set'; Playfair, *History*, 142. Omens or not, it seems clear that the rebels from the Ḥijāz had lost their momentum; in the face of the ʿAsīrīs and the Egyptian army the city of al-Mukhā was defenceless.

18 *Ibid.*, 143-4. Turkçe Bilméz was one of the approximately 150 Turks who survived, and escaped aboard a British ship to Bombay. Al-Zulfa (*Ottoman relations*, 34) completes the story of Turkçe Bilméz by stating that he later appeared in Baṣra and in time was appointed governor there.

Mandab and plans were made to extend this rule inland.<sup>19</sup> However, other rulers aspired to the rule of the Tihāma as well as the highlands of ‘Asīr.

*The position in 1839*

The political history of ‘Asīr in the mid-1800s is a complicated one. Several parties made their influence felt in the region, directly by military means, or indirectly by trade and shipping. In addition to the external powers which now turned their attention to ‘Asīr, the region had several local leaders, all with their own interests to promote. Tribal shaykhs would try to assert their own independence to the widest extent possible, by engaging in treaties with various powers—and breaking them whenever that was advantageous. Also, the religious differences between Wahhābī-oriented highlanders, Shāfi‘ī scholars on the coast and the Zaydī influence from Ṣan‘ā’ was a cause for internal division.

The *sharīf* of Abū ‘Arīsh, Ḥusayn b. ‘Alī b. Ḥaydar, was the Egyptian associate in Tihāmat ‘Asīr. *Sharīf* Abū Mismār had ruled Abū ‘Arīsh more or less independently until his death in 1233/1817-8. Husayn b. ‘Alī b. Ḥaydar, who acceded to the *sharīfate* in 1838, ruled only a limited territory around Abū ‘Arīsh proper, under Egyptian suzerainty.<sup>20</sup>

The Banū Mughayd of the ‘Asīrī highlands controlled the mountains, including Ṣabyā. Their leader Ibn Mujaththil died in 1834, after the expulsion of Turkçe Bilméz. He was succeeded by ‘Ā’id b. Mar‘ī who was opposed to the Egyptian presence in the Tihāma and regularly attacked Egyptian fortifications.<sup>21</sup>

19 Baldry, ‘Al-Yaman and the Turkish occupation’, 161.

20 Al-Nu‘mī, *Ta’rīkh ‘Asīr*, 161 and al-Zulfa, *Ottoman relations*, 33. Al-Zulfa states that Abū Mismār was succeeded by his son, Aḥmad b. Ḥummūd, but that the Egyptians, upon their conquest in 1818-20, captured Aḥmad b. Ḥummūd and installed ‘Alī b. Ḥaydar as *sharīf* of Abū ‘Arīsh. ‘Alī b. Ḥaydar was succeeded by his son, Ḥusayn b. ‘Alī b. Ḥaydar in 1838.

21 Al-Zulfa, *Ottoman relations*, 109. ‘Ā’id b. Mar‘ī was not the son of Ibn Mujaththil. Rather it seems that Ibn Mujaththil nominated ‘Ā’id as his successor, due to his personal abilities.

The imam of Ṣanʿāʾ held grievances over the loss of Tihāmat al-Yaman to the *sharīf* of Abū ʿArīsh. From Ṣanʿāʾ came the repeated claim that the coastal cities of al-Ḥudayda, Zabīd and al-Mukhā were integral parts of the imam's dominions and that they should be accordingly restored to him. In 1837 the Imam ʿAlī al-Manṣūr was deposed by ʿAbd Allāh al-Naṣr. The new imam received an Egyptian envoy in November 1837, requesting the cession of Ṣanʿāʾ, but the imam absolutely refused to accept Egyptian suzerainty.<sup>22</sup>

British troops occupied the coastal village of Aden on 16 January 1839, after an unsuccessful attempt to establish a coaling station on Socotra island.<sup>23</sup> Britain had been alarmed at the increasing power of Muḥammad ʿAlī in the Red Sea, which seemed to threaten the vital connection with India. Also, the arrival of the steamships had resulted in a need to secure coaling stations along the major shipping lanes. Aden was soon declared a free port, meant to enhance British trade in the Red Sea region and to function as a port-of-call for British vessels. The Aden settlement was placed under the administration of the Bombay Government, to emphasise its importance for naval transport to and from India. The first Political Agent at Aden was Captain S.B. Haines who remained in that office for the next fifteen years. The first act of the British at Aden was to secure treaties with the surrounding tribes, most prominently the sultan of Laḥaj. These treaties were secured by gold and the local shaykhs were given annual stipends. British officials at Aden pursued a policy of non-involvement, yet were eager to avoid the emergence of one strong power in the Yemen, which would threaten the settlement at Aden.

The *sharīf* of Mecca, who in 1839 was Muḥammad b. ʿAwn of the Banū Hāshim clan, was also interested in extending his dominions beyond the Ḥijāz and southwards along the ʿAsīrī coast. His principal interest were the ports from al-Qunfudha and southwards.<sup>24</sup>

22 Playfair, *History*, 146.

23 A history of the British occupation of Aden, and subsequent British-Arab relations in the protectorate is given by Jacobs, *Kings of Arabia*, 25-67 and Playfair, *History*, 164-75.

24 Playfair, *History*, 146. For the *sharīf* of Mecca's activities in ʿAsīr,

In addition to these various groups or powers, several tribal leaders were nominally independent of any authority and would support any leader according to circumstance. The most prominent of the Yemeni tribes were the Ḥāshid and Bakīl confederation.<sup>25</sup> This confederation originated in pre-Islamic times and inhabited the mountainous regions north/northeast of Ṣan‘ā’, bordered to the north by the territory of the ‘Asīrī tribes. Normally, the Ḥāshid and Bakīl would pay allegiance to the imam of Ṣan‘ā’, but in times of unrest they could also be expected to shift their allegiance to other rulers, according to their own interests and sympathies.

In ‘Asīr we have already discussed the Banū Mughayd who enjoyed supremacy over other highland tribes. Also in the lowlands, tribesmen remained a continuous pressure-group.

The influence exercised by the tribes was mainly due to the fact that tribal leaders could muster large number of soldiers at short notice. A tribesman was by definition a warrior, trained and skilled in warfare and the use of arms. A potential ruler would therefore ensure that he had the support of the tribes to undertake any military activity. Also, a ruler already in position was dependant on continuing support from the tribes, in order to maintain his dominions.<sup>26</sup>

### *1840–1849: From Egyptian withdrawal to Ottoman invasion*

By 1839 Muḥammad ‘Alī, by the military leadership of his son,

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see al-Nu‘mī, *Ta’rīkh ‘Asīr*, 187-9. The overview by al-Zulfa shows that Muḥammad b. ‘Awn held the *sharifate* of Mecca from 1827-1851; *Ottoman relations*, 169.

25 About the Ḥāshid and Bakīl, their lineage and their past and present, see introduction by Paul Dresch, *Tribes, Government and History in Yemen*, Oxford 1989, 1-29.

26 In order to ensure this support the imam of Ṣan‘ā’ was in the habit of taking the sons of tribal leaders and local *sayyids* as hostages. The young boys would then live in Ṣan‘ā’ and other cities and be educated there while their fathers were allowed to visit on certain occasions; from an unsigned report to the American Consul in Aden published in Sinclair, *Documents on the History of South West Arabia*, 1, 95. From internal evidence and style, it is clear that the report is written by Amin Rihani after his tour of Arabia.

Ibrāhīm Pasha, had gained control of most of the Levant and all of western Arabia.<sup>27</sup> Thus, what had begun as an expedition to oust the Wahhābīs from Mecca had led to the Viceroy of the Sublime Porte now representing a threat to the sultan himself. The European powers recognised this fact and Britain (especially) came increasingly to see Muḥammad ʿAlī as a menace. In the view of Lord Palmerston, the British Prime Minister, the Ottoman empire should be maintained at all costs, chiefly to block Russia from access to the Mediterranean. Britain also saw the relatively cordial relations between Muḥammad ʿAlī and France as a threat to her interests. The era of full-scale European imperialism had begun. The European powers now viewed each other as competitors all over the world, securing their interests by means of treaties or direct military action.

In July 1840, a meeting was held in London, where Britain, France, Prussia, Austria and Russia participated. The powers agreed to exert pressure on Muḥammad ʿAlī to withdraw all his forces from the Levant and Arabia and restore these regions to the Sublime Porte. In return, he would be granted the hereditary title as Viceroy of Egypt. Muḥammad ʿAlī refused to accept the terms, but after military pressure and a call for general revolt in Syria he was forced to do so.

Even before these events took place, the Egyptians had decided to withdraw from the Yemen. In the course of May 1840, Egyptian troops stationed in the Yemen evacuated al-Ḥudayda.<sup>28</sup>

Upon their withdrawal from the Yemen, the Egyptians had to consider one rather delicate question; who was going to rule in

27 A detailed account of the period 1840-1872 is given by al-Zulfa, *Ottoman relations*. Useful is also Playfair, *History*; Baldry, 'Al-Yaman and the Turkish Occupation'; Macro, *Yemen and the Western World*, 16-35, and Stuhlmann, *Kampf um Arabien*, 60-113. Additional details can be found in Wyman Bury, *Arabia Infelix* and Jacobs, *Kings of Arabia*. An overview of the history of ʿAsīr is included in Reissner, 'Die Idrīsīden in ʿAsīr', 167-70. In Arabic, al-Nuʿmī's *Taʾrīkh ʿAsīr* is useful for cross-referencing of dates.

28 Al-Zulfa, *Ottoman relations*, 7-8. According to al-Zulfa, the order to evacuate was given by Muḥammad ʿAlī on 13 Dhū 'l-Ḥijja 1255/17 February 1840. The Egyptians had three armies in Arabia; the first to evacuate was that stationed in the Yemen, led by Ibrāhīm Pasha, which departed from the Tihāma on 9 May 1840.

their place? The imam of Ṣan‘ā’ again claimed that the Tihāma should be restored to him. The same claim was voiced by the *sharīf* of Abū ‘Arīsh, Ḥusayn b. ‘Alī Ḥaydar, who wanted to regain the coastal plain to south of al-Ḥudayda, such as had been the region ruled by his predecessors. According to Playfair, Ibrāhīm Pasha himself preferred to hand the Tihāma over to the *sharīf* of Mecca, Muḥammad b. ‘Awn.<sup>29</sup> The imam was not strong enough to compete for the Tihāma, as he was unable to unite the many tribal leaders under his rule. The *sharīf* of Abū ‘Arīsh, on the other hand, was in a position to back his claim with military power. He was supported by tribal soldiers, and raised 20,000 men to support him in the field.<sup>30</sup> On the day of the Egyptian evacuation, the *sharīf* of Abū ‘Arīsh took possession of al-Ḥudayda. Ḥusayn b. ‘Alī Ḥaydar thereby presented both the Egyptians, the imam and the *sharīf* of Mecca with a *fait accompli*, and eventually the Egyptians accepted him as ruler of al-Ḥudayda.

*Sharīf* Ḥusayn of Abū ‘Arīsh then proceeded to take control of al-Mukhā. In this instance also the Egyptian Pasha accepted the *sharīf* as ruler, against an annual tribute of 90,000 Maria Theresa dollars.<sup>31</sup> The British at Aden were less positive towards the *sharīf*’s expansion, and immediately sent an officer to protect British subjects in al-Mukhā and to assess the new chief’s attitude towards the British. The *sharīf* proved to be no friend of Britain; the British officer was treated with insults and the *sharīf* even sent a letter to the Bombay administration where he demanded the immediate surrender of Aden. The demand was backed by threats; Aden would be taken by force if the British failed to comply.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*



The Egyptian withdrawal from the Yemen altered the balance of power in the region. By accepting the *sharīf* of Abū ʿArīsh as ruler of the Tihāma, the Turco-Egyptians sanctioned a division of the Yemen into two states; one in the highlands, ruled by the imam of Ṣanʿāʾ and one in the Tihāma, ruled by the *sharīf* of Abū ʿArīsh. The imam of Ṣanʿāʾ was not pleased with such a division, as he had expected the Tihāma to be restored to him. Thus, the later imams harboured hostile feelings towards the *sharīf* of Abū ʿArīsh, and also towards the Sublime Porte, who—ultimately—had let this happen. The British were equally displeased with the prospect of a hostile ruler in possession of all the major ports along the ʿAsīrī-Yemeni coast. Further, the division of the Yemen at the hands of the Turco-Egyptians reinforced the split which already existed between the Zaydī population of the Yemeni highlands and the mainly Sunni peoples in the coastal plain. More than before, the Tihāma and ʿAsīr was conceived of as a separate entity, independent of the ruler at Ṣanʿāʾ.

In 1840, a new imam was installed in Ṣanʿāʾ, Muḥammad al-Hādī.<sup>33</sup> He soon had to deal with unrest in his own territory as a local religious leader proclaimed himself *mahdī*, and together with his followers captured Taʿizz. As it turned out, the most prominent tribes eventually took the side of the imam and by December of 1840 the imam was again in control of the Yemen. Next, he turned to the sea, and demanded the surrender of al-Ḥudayda, al-Mukhā and the other coastal towns from the *sharīf* of Abū ʿArīsh.

The *sharīf* of Abū ʿArīsh was not willing to give up his possessions to the imam, but from 1841 he was under pressure from both Ṣanʿāʾ and Aden to withdraw to Abū ʿArīsh. In response *sharīf* Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī Ḥaydar tightened his grip on the Tihāma. According to Playfair, his rule was one of tyranny and oppression, and the merchants in the port cities received especially harsh treatment.<sup>34</sup> Heavy duties were levied on all goods, and in particular on goods destined for Aden.<sup>35</sup> In addition, mer-

33 For details on the power-shift in Ṣanʿāʾ and the subsequent problems of the new imam, see *ibid.*, 146-8.

34 *Ibid.*, 148.

35 Baldry states that *sharīf* Ḥusayn raised the import and export dues payable by British subjects from 2½ per cent to 9 per cent; Baldry,

chants were imprisoned and money demanded for their release, and they were also forced to contribute to raising an army to attack Aden. Consequently, a number of people who had property or business interests in the Tihāma cities emigrated, many of them to Aden.<sup>36</sup>

The British at Aden were sympathetic to the imam's claim over the Tihāma, as they were equally eager to see the *sharīf* ousted from the ports. Yet despite this, nothing came out of several missions sent from the imam to Aden to seek British support against the *sharīf* of Abū ‘Arīsh. Apparently, the British stuck to their principle of non-intervention, and refused to take sides in the ongoing rivalry between the two rulers.<sup>37</sup>

In early 1842, another attempt to subdue the *sharīf* of Abū ‘Arīsh failed. This time it was carried out by the Sublime Porte. Ashraf Bey arrived in al-Ḥudayda in March 1842.<sup>38</sup> The sending of an envoy originated in a British complaint to the Porte, and Ashraf Bey demanded that the *sharīf* pay the British compensation for injuries he had caused them.<sup>39</sup> But, after having stayed with the *sharīf* for a while, Ashraf Bey simply returned to Jedda, with no further action being taken. Playfair indicates that the *sharīf* had bribed the Turkish representative into inactivity. Whether this is a fact or not, the episode is the first instance of *direct* Turkish activity in the Yemen since the Ottomans evacuated the country in 1636.<sup>40</sup> The Ottomans did not yet possess enough military strength to undertake a military intervention in Yemeni affairs, so if the mission of Ashraf Bey secured his alle-

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‘Al-Yaman and the Turkish Occupation’, 161.

<sup>36</sup> Playfair states that immigration rate to Aden at one time was as high as 1,200 persons in one month; *History*, 148.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 148-9.

<sup>38</sup> According to Playfair, Ashraf Bey had orders from the Turkish Authorities to depose *sharīf* Husayn; *History*, 149. On the other hand, Baldry refers to the Turkish envoy as merely an ‘investigating commission’; ‘Al-Yaman and the Turkish Occupation’, 161.

<sup>39</sup> Some such injuries are mentioned by Baldry. Apparently the malevolent *sharīf* had cut down the flagstaff at the British Agency in al-Mukhā and insulted an officer aboard a British ship in the same city; Baldry, ‘Al-Yaman and the Turkish occupation’, 161.

<sup>40</sup> The expedition by Türkçe Bilméz in the 1830s did not lead to any Ottoman troops being stationed in Yemen/‘Asīr.

giance from the *sharīf*, that would have been quite sufficient from the Turkish point of view. From the point of view of the *sharīf*, he could not afford to be on unfriendly terms with the imam, the British and the Turks, and in this perspective he must have gone to great lengths to please the Turkish envoy.

In 1843 the *sharīf* Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī Ḥaydar of Abū ʿArīsh was invested with the title of Pasha and agreed to pay an annual tribute of 70,000 Maria Theresa dollars to the Sublime Porte.<sup>41</sup> Thus, the Turks had secured one ally in the Yemen, but this ally was (by all reports) a very unpopular ruler.

In the following years, rivalry between the *sharīf* of Abū ʿArīsh and the imam continued.<sup>42</sup> The *sharīf* pressed into the highlands of the Yemen, but apparently the population turned against him due to the heavy tribute demanded. Rumours had also begun to circulate about a large-scale Turkish expedition to the Yemen, apparently the Pasha in the Ḥijāz had received a large reinforcement of troops and equipment. Upon this news, the *sharīf* withdrew to his own stronghold in Abū ʿArīsh. In 1846-47 the position remained static, neither the imam nor the *sharīf* was willing (or in a financial position) to undertake military activity against the other.

In 1848 this period of relative stability came to an end.<sup>43</sup> The imam went into the field with all available forces for a final push into the Tihāma. Fighting between the two parties continued through 1848. The coastal cities were captured and recaptured, besieged and freed; armies were raised and deserted, with neither side able to gain the upper hand.

The period 1840-49 may be seen as an interlude in the political history of ʿAsīr. In this period ʿAsīr and the Tihāma was, by sanction from the Egyptians, defined as an entity of its own.

41 Baldry, 'Al-Yaman and the Turkish occupation', 161 and Playfair, *History*, 150.

42 In 1844 Imam Muḥammad al-Hādī died, and he was succeeded by ʿAlī Maṣṣūr, who then became imam for the second time. Also his rule was of short duration. In late 1845 he was overthrown by his nephew Yaḥyā, who took the imamate under the name al-Mutawakkil; Playfair, *History*, 150.

43 Playfair, *History*, 152, and Baldry, 'Al-Yaman and the Turkish occupation', 162.

However, during the nine years from the Egyptian withdrawal to Turkish re-occupation, the ruler of the Tihāma, the *sharīf*, was never able to consolidate fully his position. He was under constant pressure from all sides, too much so to be able to establish a lasting dynasty in the Tihāma. Thus, the question of who should control the coastal cities was never really answered;

Whilst this desultory warfare was being carried on between the Imam and Sharif Husayn b. Ali Hyder, the Turkish Government, thinking that the proper time had arrived to take possession of Yemen, sent Toufieh Pasha, with a fleet from Jeddah, and land a force under Mahommed bin Own, Shareef of Mecca, against Hodaida.<sup>44</sup>

*1849–1872-3: From the Turkish occupation of al-Ḥudayda to the Vilayet of Yemen*

In 1849, within a few months of each other, both Muḥammad ‘Alī and Ibrāhīm Pasha died. As a result of Western pressure, Egypt was now restrained, and the future of most of the Arab lands was again in the hands of the sultan in Istanbul. In 1839, the young ‘Abd al-Majīd had succeeded his father Muḥammad II on the throne. ‘Abd al-Majīd was intent on continuing the process of reform instigated by his father and from him originates a series of reform edicts known collectively as the *Tanzimat*—‘reorganisation’.<sup>45</sup> However, in its early years the *Tanzimat* had no impact on the provinces; least of all on the remote Yemen.

By sending Ashraf Pasha to Abū ‘Arīsh in 1842, the Ottomans acknowledged their responsibility for events in the Yemen. The continuing warfare between the imam and the *sharīf*

<sup>44</sup> Playfair, *History*, 153-4.

<sup>45</sup> One of the most important edicts concerned the implementation of secular law, alongside the Sharia administered by the *qāḍīs*. In doing so, the Ottomans gave up not only implementing the *sharī‘a* in practice, but also rejected the *sharī‘a* as an ideal. Secular law was implemented in all *vilayets* of the Ottoman Empire within the turn of the century, 1899-1900. As we shall see, re-implementation of the *sharī‘a* was a prominent demand among the Arab leaders on the fringes of the Empire, and was one of the important points in their demand for independence; see Mansfield, *History of the Middle East*, 33-4.

was viewed in Istanbul first and foremost as an Ottoman responsibility. In addition, the Ottoman government may have been intent on restoring firm control of its Arab provinces, to compensate for the European parts of the Empire which were beginning to break away (Greece had already achieved independence in 1833).<sup>46</sup> By 1849, the Ottomans had made up their minds to intervene in the Yemen and in the preceding year large forces had been assembled in the Ḥijāz. The Ottomans were encouraged by the British representatives at Aden, who much preferred the Ottomans to the troublesome *sharīf* of Abū ʿArīsh as guarantor of security and order along the southern Red Sea coast. R.J. Gavin states that British policy was 'to spread a safe Ottoman blanket over all parts of the Arabian coastline not already strongly tied to Britain'.<sup>47</sup> A *farmān* was issued by the sultan in Istanbul, where the order was given to bring the Yemen under direct Ottoman rule. The decision was taken on the grounds that 'this part of his [that is, the sultan's] territory had been in turmoil over a period of many years and that the people inhabiting that region had been suffering as a result of unjustifiable wars between the *sharīf* of Abū ʿArīsh and the imam of the Yemen'.<sup>48</sup>

Al-Zulfa states that an Ottoman fleet under the command of Tawfīq Pasha reached Kamrān Island on 14 Jumādā I 1265/9 June 1849 and that the Ottoman troops entered al-Ḥudayda five days later.<sup>49</sup> This fleet was supported by a land force dispatched by the *sharīf* of Mecca.<sup>50</sup> The *sharīf* of Abū ʿArīsh was forced to restore his possessions in the Tihāma to the Porte. Thereafter the *sharīf* retreated to Abū ʿArīsh, to live there on Turkish pension.<sup>51</sup>

46 Mansfield, *ibid.*, 54.

47 R.J. Gavin, *Aden under British Rule 1838-1967*, London 1975, 72.

48 Al-Zulfa, *Ottoman Relations*, 64-5. The date of this *farmān* is given by al-Zulfa as 17 Rajab 1264/ 20 June 1848.

49 Date given *ibid.*, 75.

50 On the Ottoman invasion of the Tihāma, see al-Zulfa, *Ottoman Relations*, 64-76; Playfair, *History*, 152-5 and Baldry, 'Al-Yaman and the Turkish Occupation', 162.

51 According to Playfair, this pension never appeared, and the *sharīf* set out for Istanbul to try his case before the sultan. On his way there, he died under what Playfair refers to as 'circumstances of great suspicion, in March 1851'; *History*, 154. Baldry also states, based

After the Turkish invasion in 1849, the administration of the Tihāma cities was divided in the following way: Tawfīq Pasha became governor of al-Ḥudayda, Bayt al-Faqīh and Sanif. *Sharīf* ‘Abd Allāh, son of the *sharīf* of Mecca, was created Pasha, and given the governorship of al-Mukhā, Zabīd and Ḥays.<sup>52</sup> Ottoman control was established in the main Tihāma cities and Tawfīq Pasha quickly consolidated his position. Then he turned towards the interior and summoned the imam of Ṣan‘ā’ to surrender his territory to Ottoman overlordship. The imam, Yaḥyā al-Mutawakkil, was hesitant, while the most influential tribes (such as the Dhū Ḥusayn and Dhū Muḥammad) treated the idea with scorn. In July 1849, the imam travelled to al-Ḥudayda to meet with Tawfīq Pasha and there an agreement was signed for the imam to rule under Ottoman overlordship. After signing the treaty, the imam travelled with Tawfīq Pasha and a Turkish delegation to Ṣan‘ā’ to inaugurate the new regime. They arrived in Ṣan‘ā’ on a Thursday and it was announced that the Friday prayer the following day would be read in the name of the sultan. Upon hearing this, the people of Ṣan‘ā’ took to arms and most of the Turks were killed. The imam was imprisoned (and later beheaded) for his treachery and ‘Alī Maṣṣūr was reinstated as imam for the third time. Tawfīq Pasha barely escaped, seriously wounded, and died early the following year from his injuries and hardships.<sup>53</sup>

Thus, during their first year in the Yemen, the Ottomans

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on PRO references, that the *sharīf* died on his way to Istanbul; ‘Al-Yaman and the Turkish occupation’, 162. Al-Zulfa, on the other hand, states that the *sharīf* reached Istanbul and thereupon settled in Mecca where he lived until his death in 1855; *Ottoman relations*, 97. Whatever happened to the *sharīf* Ḥusayn, it was the end of his rule in the Tihāma and of the *sharīfate* of Abū ‘Arish. The descendants of *sharīf* Ḥusayn continued to live at Abū ‘Arish with the title of *qā’immaqām*; al-Zulfa, *ibid.* At a later stage the *ashrāf* of Abū ‘Arish were taken to Abḥā as political prisoners by ‘Ā’id b. Mar‘ī; al-Zulfa, *ibid.*, 113.

- <sup>52</sup> On the partition of the Tihāma between the Ottomans and the *sharīf* of Mecca, see Playfair, *History*, 154, and Baldry, ‘Al-Yaman and the Turkish occupation’, 162.
- <sup>53</sup> On the Ottoman failure to gain control of Ṣan‘ā’, see Playfair, *History*, 154-5, and al-Zulfa, *Ottoman relations*, 77-8.

managed to gain a reasonably strong grip on Tihāmat al-Yaman, but in the Zaydī-dominated Yemeni mountains they failed to gain any influence. Also in the northern parts of the Tihāma, Tihāmat ʿAsīr, Ottoman power was weak. This was mainly due to opposition from the Banū Mughayd, who from their base around Abhā in the ʿAsīrī mountains could undertake raids down to the coastal plain. (The leader of this tribe was, as stated above, ʿĀʾid b. Marʿī al-Mughaydī, who had succeeded Ibn Mujaththil as *amīr* of ʿAsīr al-Sarāh.) Nevertheless, the Turks were still resolved to subdue all of the Yemen and turn it into one unified province. In the early 1850s Turkish troops engaged in some half-hearted raids in the direction of Ṣanʿāʾ and Aden, but nothing came of these initiatives.<sup>54</sup>

In 1856 the ʿAsīrī highland tribes rose in rebellion, following a period of unrest in the Ḥijāz.<sup>55</sup> An army led by ʿĀʾid b. Marʿī al-Mughaydī marched towards al-Ḥudayda in January 1856. The Turkish Governor had by then concentrated all available forces in defence of the city. The British also had sent ships and troops from Aden to protect British subjects. According to some sources<sup>56</sup> the sight of two British vessels in the port of al-Ḥudayda discouraged the ʿAsīrī troops from their resolve to capture the city. In addition, an outbreak of cholera in the ʿAsīrī camp forced them to withdraw to the highlands.<sup>57</sup>

In April 1856 ʿĀʾid b. Marʿī al-Mughaydī died. He was succeeded by his second son Muḥammad b. ʿĀʾid, who continued to attack Turkish strongholds in ʿAsīr.<sup>58</sup>

In the first decade of their presence in the Yemen, the Ottomans had still not gained control of the entire region. Opposition was strong, both in the ʿAsīrī mountains and among the Zaydī tribes of the Yemeni highlands. In the Tihāma the

54 Playfair, *History*, 156.

55 Accounts of this uprising are given by Al-Zulfa, *Ottoman relations*, 101-6 and Playfair, *History*, 158.

56 Playfair, *ibid.*, and Baldry, 'Al-Yaman and the Turkish Occupation', 165, referring to FO 195/522/1.

57 According to al-Zulfa, the cholera outbreak killed between 10,000 and 15,000 of the ʿAsīrī soldiers, including two sons of ʿĀʾid b. Marʿī; *Ottoman relations*, 105.

58 Al-Zulfa, *ibid.*, 105-6.

Ottomans governed the cities through governors or *wālīs*, but their influence did not extend far outside the city gates. Through the 1860s ‘Asīr was in a very disturbed state, with ongoing conflicts between the ‘Asīrīs under Amīr Muḥammad b. ‘Ā’id, the remaining *ashrāf* of Abū ‘Arīsh and the Ottomans, as well in internal rivalry within the different groups. Turkish attempts to resolve the situation led to no permanent solution.<sup>59</sup>

The opening of the Suez canal in 1869 greatly facilitated the sending of troops from Istanbul to Arabia, and with this advantage the Ottomans in 1870 decided on a final attempt to subdue the entire Yemen.<sup>60</sup> The ‘Asīrīs had taken to the field in October 1870 and in the course of a few weeks, the Ottomans had lost control of Abū ‘Arīsh, Zabīd and Bayt al-Faqīh. Next, the ‘Asīrīs turned towards al-Ḥudayda, which was attacked in November 1870.<sup>61</sup> This attack was answered with great force, and the Ottomans could now begin with a determined push into ‘Asīr.

The Turkish decision of a final drive to subdue ‘Asīr and occupy all of the Yemen was supported by the *sharīf* of Mecca, who also sent troops to assist.<sup>62</sup> Turkish forces seized al-Qunḍūḥa in March 1871; the city had then been controlled by the Muḥayyidīs. The expedition continued into the mountain regions

<sup>59</sup> About the 1860s and the rule of Muḥammad b. ‘Ā’id al-Muḥayyidī, see al-Zulfa, *ibid.*, 113-38.

<sup>60</sup> Al-Zulfa, *ibid.*, 142. The Ottoman considered a final invasion of the entire Yemen and ‘Asīr, partly because of the increasingly independent and powerful *amīr* Muḥammad b. ‘Ā’id. When the ‘Asīrīs started to attack the Ottomans in ‘Asīr and the Yemen in October 1870, it was, according to al-Zulfa, this direct threat which finally caused the Ottomans to opt for a full-scale invasion of the Yemen. See also Baldry, ‘Al-Yaman and the Turkish Occupation’, 166-7.

<sup>61</sup> Baldry, *ibid.*, 167, and al-Zulfa, *Ottoman relations*, 143-4. The ‘Asīrī attack on al-Ḥudayyda is also described by G. Wyman Bury (*Arabia Infelix*, 14-15) and includes the following little anecdote: ‘... The attempt was repulsed with great slaughter, for the Asiri were out to do or die. On the dead were found letters, signed by the Emir, which must have tended to make them regardless of their earthly fate. “To my brother Gabriel. So and so, son of so and so, is coming to you; admit him to Heaven.” (Signed) Muhamed Eyad, Emir of the Faithful.’

<sup>62</sup> The history of the Ottoman final victory over the Amirate of ‘Asīr is told by al-Zulfa, *Ottoman relations*, 139-66.



of ʿAsīr and the Ottomans had now gained support of the Rijāl al-Māʿ, who were a rival tribe of the Mughaydīs.<sup>63</sup> In the course of 1871, ʿAsīr was finally subdued, and *amīr* Muḥammad b. ʿĀʾiḍ killed.<sup>64</sup>

After the final Ottoman victory, ʿAsīr was divided into nine administrative districts. These nine districts are listed by Baldry as: Abhā, Muhāʾil, Raydah, Rijāl al-Māʿ, Tanūma, Ṣabyā, Halī, al-Qunfudha and Shuqayq.<sup>65</sup> Ottoman troops remained permanently stationed in ʿAsīr, which became a *sanjak* of the Ottoman Vilayet al-Yaman.

After having gained control of ʿAsīr, Ottoman forces continued towards Ṣanʿāʾ. They reached the city in April 1872 and it fell without much resistance, 'for the city was tired of its quarrelsome and incompetent rulers and wanted peace'.<sup>66</sup> By 1872, all of the Yemen was incorporated into the Ottoman Empire, under the name Vilayet al-Yaman. It was divided into four *sanjaks*: Markaz, ʿAsīr, al-Ḥudayda and al-Tāʾizz. Ṣanʿāʾ was chosen as the administrative centre by the Turks. The imam remained in position as religious leader on Turkish pension, but was kept in virtual seclusion.<sup>67</sup>

The Vilayet al-Yaman was administered by a *wālī*, appointed by the Turkish authorities. The Turkish occupation meant that both the *sharīf* of Abū ʿArīsh and the Mughaydī tribe was pacified. Nevertheless, Ottoman control in ʿAsīr, remained weak, despite incorporation into the Ottoman system. For a large part, their rule was in name only; their actual power confined to the scattered garrison towns of ʿAsīr. With the two above mentioned local powers subdued, there was no longer a local focal point for the tribes to give their support to. It can be said that the

63 Baldry, 'Al-Yaman and the Turkish Occupation', 167.

64 Al-Zulfa, *Ottoman relations*, 161.

65 Baldry, 'Al-Yaman and the Turkish Occupation', 167. Al-Zulfa lists the administrative districts somewhat differently: Abhā, Muhāʾil, Tanūma, al-Shibayn, Rijāl al-Māʿ, Ṣabyā, Raghadān, Bilād al-Ghamd wa Zahrān and al-Qunfudha; *Ottoman relations*, 162. Most likely, this variation is caused by differences in language and definition, as Baldry relies on an Arab writer while al-Zulfa relies on Ottoman material.

66 Wyman Bury, *Arabia Infelix*, 15.

67 Baldry, 'Al-Yaman and the Turkish Occupation', 168.

arrival of the Turks disrupted the ‘old’ system, where the highland and lowland tribes paid their allegiance to two different rulers. For a period after the Turkish occupation, many of the tribal leaders remained loyal to the Ottoman overlords. But, this system was bound to be temporary, given the Ottoman weakness. Widespread, unorganized tribal revolts broke out again, both in ‘Asīr and the Yemen.

*1871-2-1906: The Turks in the Yemen and rebellions*

Turkish rule in the Yemen is repeatedly referred to as ‘misrule’; exactly what is meant by this is more difficult to assess.<sup>68</sup> The main grievance of the Yemeni population was the high taxation imposed by the Turkish rulers. To the Yemeni population, who were accustomed to pay the religiously-sanctioned *zakāt*, the Ottoman system of taxation was intolerable. The greater part of the taxation was imposed on the rural population and it was collected in kind. This meant that the farmer had barely finished the harvest before a Turkish official showed up and went away with a substantial part of the produce. Consequently, tax-collectors were often attacked and their arrival led to the outbreak of tribal revolts.

Also in the cities, trade and commercial activity was heavily taxed. In the ports, high taxes were imposed on imports and exports. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, the Ottoman Empire itself was in very bad financial shape. It was therefore necessary to get as much income as possible from the provinces to pay the state’s increasingly heavy debts.

The Turkish governors seemingly also failed to undertake another important task traditionally assigned to the ruler, namely to ensure security along the roads and for the pilgrims *en route* to Mecca. This meant that no traveller could feel safe for his person or his belongings, which again meant a serious restraint on trade and commercial activity.

As for the religious differences between the Ottomans and the Arab leaders, these seem to have become acute over time.

<sup>68</sup> See details on Turkish rule in the Yemen after the establishment of the *vilayet* in Baldry, ‘Al-Yaman and the Turkish Occupation’, 168-81. See also Stuhlmann, *Kampf um Arabien*, 72-81.

Apparently, the Ottomans chose not to interfere in the religious practices of the civilian population, but the potential for unrest was always present, especially when the Ottoman administration wished to implement enterprises which were deemed by Arab *'ulamā'* to be contrary to the *sharī'a*. The gradual secularisation of Ottoman law and personal practices greatly increased this potential for conflict. When the Ottomans tried to implement the *kanūn*, the civil code, this was met with fierce resistance among the Arabs.

A final point to be mentioned is that to a Turkish official, the Yemen was a hardship posting—to be sent to the Yemen was not a promotion. Consequently, the officer corps and the Ottoman officials there were an underpaid and discontented lot, with little ambition to create a lasting and practical system. Rather, their ambition was to enrich themselves as much as possible while enduring their service in the *vilayet*.<sup>69</sup>

Baldry sums up Yemeni discontent with Turkish rule from the point of view of the imam of Ṣan'ā', which we can assume to be an equally good description of the state of affairs in 'Asīr:

The Ottoman administration in Yaman was remarkable for its inactivity: almost no public works were completed, the country was being gradually drained of its many resources by corrupt officialdom at every level. Turkish troops, drawn for the most part from Albania, were accused of being devotees of homosexual practices and rape was commonplace; alcoholic drinks were freely available in cafés near Bāb al-Yaman in Ṣan'ā', offences which aroused great hostility among the Zaydī *'ulamā'*. Even graver, in the eyes of the imam, was the substitution of Ottoman civil law for that of the *sharī'ah*. In their turn, the agricultural classes suffered great poverty as a result of the rigour with which taxes were collected, even in years of drought, and the levying of taxes not sanctioned by religious law. The merchant community, the majority of whom were British Indians, suffered from the absence of adequate port facilities in al-Ḥudaydah, although a pier-tax had been collected on all goods passing through the port for years, ostensibly

69 Jacobs, *Kings of Arabia*, 75. Comments Jacobs: 'The Turkish rule was never very stable in the Yemen, and their best men feared the loss of reputation in so little popular a province, which by reason of Turkish losses in the guerilla hill-warfare since 1892 was playfully termed 'The Cemetery of the Turks'—*mukbirat al atrāk*'.

for the construction of a new wharf.<sup>70</sup>

As a consequence, discontent simmered in the Yemen. In 1882 several tribes rose in rebellion. In ‘Asīr the Banū Malik (north of Abhā) rebelled; further south other tribes rose in opposition. The uprising of 1882 marked the beginning of ‘a state of almost chronic rebellion’,<sup>71</sup> lasting through the 1880s. These rebellions, instigated by various ‘Asīrī and Yemeni tribal leaders, were suppressed with great harshness, which in turn produced more bitterness and hatred.

In 1891 the imam urged tribesmen to march on Ṣan‘ā’ and in this uprising more than a thousand Turkish soldiers were killed.<sup>72</sup> Unrest continued through the 1890s. In 1894 the Rijāl al-Mā‘ revolted, and by 1895 several other Tihāma-‘Asīrī tribes rose. By 1898, ‘Asīr was in reality in a state of chaos. Insecurity prevailed everywhere in the region, and Turkish troops were sent from one place to the next to quench unrest, while armed Arabs harassed the Turks at every turn. As the century turned, the situation in ‘Asīr made no turn for the better. In January 1903, the Rijāl al-Mā‘ once again joined the rebellion in ‘Asīr. In the same year the Turks imposed two new taxes on the Ghamd and Zahrān districts of northern ‘Asīr which the shaykhs refused to pay. Turkish forces were sent to the region, but were defeated and ‘Asīr was described as ‘practically self-governing for the most part with little show of Ottoman authority’.<sup>73</sup> Efforts to end the trouble were hindered by the open revolt instigated by the new imam of Ṣan‘ā’, Imam Yaḥyā who succeeded his father in 1904.<sup>74</sup> This meant that by the end of 1904, insurrection was universal throughout the Yemen and ‘Asīr. In January 1905 the recently appointed new *wālī* of the Yemen, Maḥmūd Nadīm Bey arrived at al-Ḥudayda. He managed, during his first year in office, to establish a frail order in the Yemen and ‘Asīr, but not

70 John Baldry, ‘Imam Yahya and the Yemeni uprising of 1904-07’, 35.

71 Baldry, ‘Al-Yaman and the Turkish Occupation’, 169, quoting London Foreign Office sources.

72 *Ibid.*, 168-9.

73 *Ibid.*, 173

74 For details on this revolt, see Baldry, ‘Imām Yaḥyā and the Yamanī uprising of 1904-1907’.

without great loss of Turkish as well as Arab lives. This was a frail order indeed, and it lasted for no longer than a year.

The ground was prepared for the development of a new entity, the state created by Muḥammad al-Yamanī al-Idrīsī.

### 3

#### THE ANTECEDENTS: AḤMAD B. IDRĪS AND THE IDRĪSĪ TRADITION

The Idrīsī state that arose in ʿAsīr in 1906-26 may be seen as having been founded upon an existing structure—a structure originating in the Idrīsī Sufi tradition. To investigate the origin of the Idrīsī state it is therefore necessary to review the background of that tradition, from its founder, the Sufi shaykh Aḥmad b. Idrīs, who was the great-grandfather of the leader of the Idrīsī state.

##### *The development of Sufism*

According to J.S. Trimingham,<sup>1</sup> the development of the Sufi orders in Islam can broadly be seen as falling into three roughly defined stages.

In the first stage (c. 700-1100 AD), the idea of a mystical approach to Islam developed. Where orthodox Islam focused on the collective, societal traits of religion, individual devotees sought for a more personal, inner experience of Divine Reality. There developed the idea of a path, a way towards *gnosis*, intuitive knowledge of the all-powerful and all-transcending God. The way towards enlightenment came to be seen as consisting of several stages, by which the seeker removed (one by one) the veils separating the human from the divine and finally obtained the ultimate goal of the journey, mystical union with the Creator. In the first centuries of Islam the individual seekers lived like

1 J. Spencer Trimingham, *The Sufi Orders in Islam*, Oxford 1971, 1-104. This threefold division has been questioned by other authors who point out that it is not universally applicable. See for instance Karrār, *Sufi Brotherhoods*, 1-4.

wandering *faqīrs*, reportedly often wearing woollen clothes. From this the term Sufism may have been derived (from Arabic *ṣūf*—wool, *taṣawwuf*—Sufism). Around the year 1000, a pattern of master-apprentice relationships developed; the novice took instruction in the Way from an experienced master. Gradually there emerged centres of learning where several students took guidance from one shaykh. This process evolved alongside the spread of Islam and with the development of doctrines during the Abbasid period. This period is often referred to as the 'Golden Age' of Sufism.

In the second stage a new feature of Sufism developed. The Sufi shaykh who passed on knowledge of the way to his students would do so in his name. The path (*ṭarīqa*) thereby came to carry the name of the shaykh who founded it and as such it was spread by his disciples. This development took place in the Saljuq period, c. 1100-1400 AD. Connected to the idea of various *ṭarīqas* was also the concept of *silsila* (chain of transmission). As a shaykh would teach his *madhhab* (method) to his students, he would also trace the chain of knowledge backwards to its source, that is to the Prophet or his family and the Companions. The students would then carry this knowledge further, thereby becoming one additional link in the chain, the *silsila*. In this period several teachers founded their own *ṭarīqas*, and in so doing traced their spiritual heritage backwards to the earlier mystics.

At this stage the doctrines of Islamic theology and jurisprudence (*fiqh*) were fully developed, formulating the Revealed Law, the *sharīʿa*. The further evolution of Sufism now had to conform to the doctrines of the orthodox '*ulamā*' to win their recognition. The Saljuqs encouraged this process in Arab lands by establishing orthodox schools but also by supporting centres which taught the mystical path.

In the Maghreb, the Sufi *ṭarīqas* were slow to gain a foothold. Trimmingham gives the implementation of strict Mālikī *fiqh* as the reason for this. However, Sufism began to flourish also in the Maghreb from around 1100-1200 AD.

Maghrebi Sufism was to be strongly linked to one name, Abū 'l-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī (1196-1258). His teachings did not

emerge as a *ṭarīqa* during his own lifetime, but were continued by his students in the scattered *zāwiyas* (lodges, spiritual centres) where he had stayed. His principal student and *khalīfa* (successor), Aḥmad al-Mursī (1219-87) kept up correspondence with the other Shādhilī *zāwiyas* and thus established a coherent network which was to become the Shādhiliyya *ṭarīqa*. The Shādhiliyya spread throughout the Maghreb from this time, but it was by no means the only *ṭarīqa* present in the region. The movement established itself in Morocco under the rule of the Marinids (c. 1250-1450). These rulers had the same function in Morocco as the Saljuqs had in the east. They founded orthodox *madrasas* (schools), but they also supported Sufi *zāwiyas*. In fact in the Maghreb developments went even further and Sufi teaching became an accepted complement to traditional *fiqh*, not just a tolerated offshoot.

The third stage in the development of Sufism (as given by Trimmingham) starts around the year 1500, when the *ṭarīqas* began to be organised into fully developed *orders*. The *ṭarīqas* became hierarchic brotherhoods into which the novice was initiated. The emphasis tended to shift from the individual, mystical content to the collective function of the *organisation*. The local *zāwiyas*, both urban and rural, persisted as before, and the basic beliefs of Sufism remained unchanged.

It was the *content* of Sufi teaching that changed, and in the Maghreb this process was more clearly manifest than in other Islamic regions. The new element was a strong emphasis on the shaykh and his *baraka* (spiritual power, or 'holiness'). To possess *baraka* meant to be favoured by God, or to be a 'friend of God'—a *walī*.<sup>2</sup> *Baraka* came to be regarded as something that

2 From the Arabic root *walā*, to be near. The phrase is used in the Koran, for example 10:62, 'Surely God's friends—no fear shall be on them' (Arberry's translation). When used in a religious connection *walī* corresponds very much to the Christian term 'saint'. This new element of popular belief evolved for a large part from the writings of 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad b. Sulaymān b. Abī Bakr al-Jazūlī from Morocco (d. 1470). He was initiated into the Shādhiliyya. In his writings and teachings he elaborated on the system of possession of *baraka* and its hereditary properties. He did not found a *ṭarīqa* in the conventional sense, but brought a new aim and direction to Sufism; *First Encyclopaedia of Islam 1913-1936*, Leiden 1987.



could be passed on or inherited. Consequently, whole groups took to claiming descent from known shaykhs or holy men. The tradition of venerating not only the shaykh, but his entire family became a typical Maghrebi phenomenon; people attached themselves to holy men or families because they were favoured by God. The movement became a popular one, permeating every level of society. The concept of sacred families became an integral part of every aspect of Maghrebi life, and popular practices such as the cult of saints and tomb veneration flourished. This development differed from that in the Mashreq (under Ottoman rule). There the trend was towards greater conformity with orthodoxy, since Ottoman power was strong and had its backbone in the established *‘ulamā’*.

According to Trimmingham, the cost was the spiritual depth and mystical content of the Sufi way. The development described here has been termed the Shādhilī-Jazūlī tradition, and it was the dominant element of religious life in Morocco by the time Aḥmad b. Idrīs arrived in Fez in about 1770.

### *Aḥmad b. Idrīs in Morocco*

Aḥmad b. Idrīs was born into the Ḥasanī *sharīfian* class of Morocco. His date of birth is uncertain<sup>3</sup> and there are no contemporary sources from his life in the Maghreb. Of his immediate family and early life, very little is known. There are reports that he was taught by two of his brothers while still living in the family home.

Around the age of twenty, that is around 1770, he moved to Fez to start his education at the Qarawiyyīn. There he came into contact with the two main streams of Moroccan intellectual life, the orthodox *‘ulamā’* and the teachings of the Sufis. At this point it should be noted that the division between these two ‘branches’ was far from absolute; they were both active within the environment of the Qarawiyyīn, despite the banning of Sufi

3 O’Fahey lists five possible years, given by various sources. I will adopt the date given by the Adārisa of Luxor, 1163/1750; O’Fahey, *Enigmatic Saint*, 32. The following on Ibn Idrīs’ years in Fez is largely based on O’Fahey, 27-53.

teaching at the school.<sup>4</sup> Aḥmad b. Idrīs received a formal Islamic education and he was taught by some of the most influential Maghrebi scholars of his time. Some of his teachers were active within the revisionist group of Sultan Sīdī Muḥammad, others were not.<sup>5</sup> However, it seems reasonable to conclude that the environment in which Ibn Idrīs was educated was marked by a clear *will to reform*. This general trend may have originated from the sultan's efforts to bring the Qarawiyyīn scholars under his control, resulting in his decree about the curriculum at the school.

On the other hand, in the late eighteenth century the urge to reform Islam from within was seen in many parts of the Muslim world. This impulse has often been viewed as a result of the 'Western challenge', implying that the movement was reactive in nature. The most obvious argument against such theories is of course the Wahhābīs of the Arabian Desert who had virtually no contact with the west at the time the doctrines of the movement evolved.<sup>6</sup> Other reform movements, such as that of Shāh Walī Allāh<sup>7</sup> in India also called for allowing *ijtihād* and the reform of

4 The Moroccan Sultan Muḥammad III was himself a scholar, and during his reign he took a great interest in the curriculum taught at the Qarawiyyīn. The sultan favoured a stronger emphasis on the original sources in the study of *fiqh*. He can thus be seen as a representative of the *ahl al-ḥadīth* (the people of Prophetic tradition), a movement towards greater purity in the teaching of Islamic doctrine. In 1788 he issued a decree in which he forbade the use of secondary material in the teaching of *ḥadīth* at the Qarawiyyīn. In the same decree the teaching of Sufism at the school was forbidden; O'Fahey, *Enigmatic Saint*, 34.

5 See *ibid.*, 35-8 for an overview of Ibn Idrīs' teachers. The names include Ibn Sūda, Ibn Kīrān and Ibn Shaqrūn al-Fāsi.

6 The Wahhābī movement based its ideology on the teachings of Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Wahhāb, born in the Arabian desert in 1703. He attacked the veneration of the tombs of saints and holy men and spoke against the '*ulamā*' for having accepted such practices. The teachings of Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb aroused fear and hostility among the religious establishment, and he was expelled from the great teaching centres. He then sought protection from the Najdi prince Muḥammad b. Sa'ūd who granted him asylum.

7 Shāh Walī Allāh al-Dihlawī (1703-62) may be called the founder of Islamic modernism. He completed numerous works expressing his radically new thinking, but attempts to implement his ideas met with failure; *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, New Edn, Leiden 1960- (henceforth

Islamic society. Thus, the urge to reform can also be seen to have come from *within* the *umma* (the Muslim community), as a result of the overall sense of social and moral decay and the obvious discrepancy between the ideal society of the first Muslims and the society of the day. In the Maghreb, the spread of Islam had occurred largely by the help of Sufism, but over the years the incorporation of local beliefs and practices had produced a set of teachings quite different from that of the early mystics who originally had brought the faith. Now, the impulse for change was also present in Sufi circles and by the time Ibn Idrīs was brought into contact with these groups, the seeds of revival had already been sown.

Aḥmad b. Idrīs seems to have been initiated into the mystical disciplines only at a later stage in his education and his masters came from the Shādhiliyya tradition. His first shaykh was a Mauritanian scholar known as Muḥammad Limjaydrī b. Ḥabīb Allāh al-Shinqīṭī and through him Ibn Idrīs was introduced to his (by most reports) principal master, ʿAbd al-Waḥhāb al-Tāzī.<sup>8</sup> Little is known about this important figure who apparently had a profound influence on Ibn Idrīs' spiritual development. Ibn Idrīs is said to have stayed with al-Tāzī for four years, until the latter's death in 1792. After that Ibn Idrīs stayed with the one who was to be his last master, Abū 'l-Qāsim al-Wazīr. From these shaykhs Ibn Idrīs took many Sufi affiliations, mainly within the Shādhiliyya but also others.

Ibn Idrīs was affiliated with Sufi circles that had within them 'seeds of change'. In saying this we cannot refer to Ibn Idrīs' own masters, since relatively little is known about these figures. The assumption of a Sufi-based Maghrebi drive towards revival is based on the life and teachings of another mystic who stayed at intervals in Fez at the same time as Ibn Idrīs. This person is Aḥmad al-Tijānī.<sup>9</sup> We do not know the nature of the contact between al-Tijānī and Ibn Idrīs, or even if there was any contact

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*El* (2)).

8 Concerning Ibn Idrīs' Sufi affiliations in Fez, see O'Fahey, *Enigmatic Saint*, 38-9.

9 On al-Tijānī, see O'Fahey, *op.cit.*, 46, and Vikør, *Sufi and Scholar*, 58-60 and *Sources for Sanūsī Studies*, Bergen 1996, 23-7.

at all. What we do know is that both of them were to found orders or traditions of enormous influence on several African societies. It seems likely that they knew of each other and that the thoughts expressed by al-Tijānī in the late 1700s were known in the Fez milieu, Ibn Idrīs included.

Al-Tijānī's name is linked to the concept *ṭarīqa Muḥammadiyya* or 'The Muḥammadan Way'. The same concept has been used as an overall label for the orders that came into being in the nineteenth century, the orders derived from Ibn Idrīs being among them. *Ṭarīqa Muḥammadiyya* is usually described as a rejection of the ultimate goal of mystical union with God. Instead the Sufi should concentrate on achieving 'union with the spirit of the Prophet' by focusing his spiritual exercises on the Prophet.<sup>10</sup> This shift has been linked to the wider movement described above, the desire to reform Islam by returning to the original *ḥadīth* in formulating the Law, and stricter conformity to doctrine. Following this line of reasoning, the Prophet is the ultimate authority, and to achieve union with him will enable the seeker to gain access to the message in its uncorrupted form. This approach to mysticism is also associated with more sober practices, rejection of saint worship and cult elements and conformity to the *sharīʿa*.

Al-Tijānī is reported to have received the way directly from the Prophet in a vision. His way was therefore not transmitted through the various links of a *silsila*. The *ṭarīqa Tijāniyya* was taken directly by al-Tijānī from the final and undisputed authority, and on this basis al-Tijānī claimed to be 'the seal of the saints'. Ibn Idrīs came to be the other renowned exponent of the *ṭarīqa Muḥammadiyya* (and he states in one of his letters that he took the way from his teacher, al-Tāzī, who in turn had taken it from the Prophet).<sup>11</sup>

10 See R.S. O'Fahey and Bernd Radtke, 'Neo-Sufism reconsidered', *Der Islam*, lxx, 1, 1993, 52-87, for a discussion of Neo-Sufi teachings in relation to the concept *ṭarīqa Muḥammadiyya*. With reference to the writings of the Idrīsī tradition, O'Fahey and Radtke argue that 'the *imitatio Muḥammadi* was a means, a way to the union with God—and not a substitute' (p. 70).

11 In a letter to Muḥammad ʿUthmān al-Mirghanī, Ibn Idrīs stated that: 'And there is another version of the chain which is higher than this,

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When Aḥmad b. Idrīs left Fez, probably in 1798, he had spent 30 years at the Qarawiyyīn.<sup>12</sup> He was now an experienced scholar and a Sufi. The society he had lived in was one seeking change. The period of Ibn Idrīs' stay was a time when the two streams of Islamic scholarliness, Sufism and scholarly teaching, searched for a new orientation, a revival.

For the following 30 years we have very little information about the life of Ibn Idrīs. He travelled eastwards along the coast to Cairo, where he reportedly gave lectures at al-Azhar.<sup>13</sup> In 1799 he arrived in Mecca, but before that he may have made his first trip to Upper Egypt. This region seems to have been an important one for Ibn Idrīs, yet we do not know when and on how many occasions he visited it. His arrival in Upper Egypt in 1814 appears to be well documented and on this occasion he spent several years in the village of al-Zayniyya near Luxor, which was later to become an important centre for the Idrīsī tradition. There exists a French account describing a revolt in Upper Egypt in 1824-25 initiated by 'un moghrebin Ahmed-ebn-Drīs, revenait de la Mecque par Kosseir'.<sup>14</sup> If this episode refers to the same Aḥmad b. Idrīs, it indicates two things. Firstly, that Ibn Idrīs visited Upper Egypt again, after his return to Mecca around 1819. Secondly it indicates a political activism so far not associated with Ibn Idrīs.

When not living in Upper Egypt, Ibn Idrīs lived as a teacher

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for we received the way from our aforementioned Shaykh 'Abd al-Wahhāb (al-Tāzī), and he received it from the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace ...'; Thomassen and Radtke, *Letters*, 67.

12 O'Fahey, *Enigmatic Saint*, 50.

13 *Ibid.*, 52.

14 F. Mengin, *Histoire Sommaire de l'Egypte sous le Gouvernement de Mohammad-Aly*, Paris 1839 5-6. Quoted by O'Fahey, *op.cit.*, 56. To the sources given in *Enigmatic Saint* on the revolt of 'Ibn Idrīs', one may add Muḥammad 'Abd al-Raḥīm Al-Nidā' fī daf' al-iftirā', Cairo 1371/1953, 82. This work by a Sudanese historian describes 'Ibn Idrīs' as one Aḥmad al-Idrīsī al-lsnāwī who proclaimed himself to be the *mahdī* in Upper Egypt. After his defeat at the hands of the government forces, he fled to the Sudan where he stayed in Dongola and died near al-Dabba. The question of who this Ibn Idrīs was, and if he was 'our' Ibn Idrīs has still to be resolved. See also discussion by Vikør, *Sufi and Scholar*, 106-8.

in the Ḥijāz. Mecca became the base for his preaching, and during his years there he reached great influence but also controversy. From around 1800, the entire Ḥijāz underwent a major political upheaval. If Ibn Idrīs's coming to Mecca was spurred by devotional motives, he too was forced to consider the ideological standpoint of Mecca's new rulers, the Wahhābīs.

*Ibn Idrīs in Mecca: A controversial shaykh*

Ibn Idrīs arrived in Mecca in the first half of 1799.<sup>15</sup> He was to remain in the Ḥijāz for the next 30 years, with exception of the years spent in Egypt. He evidently came to Mecca only for devotional reasons<sup>16</sup> and once there started teaching in various parts of the city. However, before long his teaching aroused controversy among the 'ulamā' establishment. It is difficult to find out what happened, given that we really do not know exactly what Ibn Idrīs taught in Mecca. The core of the charges against him are given by al-Mīrghanī: 'The burden of their rejection (*al-mkār*) of him was because of his reliance (*'amalīhi*) on the Sunna, in that he did not follow any school, but his reliance was on the Book and (the Prophet's) Sunna'.<sup>17</sup> Rejection of the 'fanaticism of the schools' (*ta'aṣṣub al-madhāhib*) has been described as one of the hallmarks of the Neo-Sufi movements in general and the Idrīsī tradition in particular. Undoubtedly, this was a subject of great importance to Ibn Idrīs and it is also stressed by his most famous students. The much-favoured return to the sources of Law would, logically, mean that one had the option to circumvent the *ijtihād* performed by the early scholars—and in this perspective the absolute division between the four schools became less relevant. In addition, in the view of Ibn Idrīs and others, the division led to splits in the Muslim community which had not been there in the times of the Prophet. Again, we see the will to restore the original power of Islam as a

15 O'Fahey, *Enigmatic Saint*, 58. This section on Ibn Idrīs' Meccan years is largely based on the reconstruction by O'Fahey, pp. 58-80.

16 Al-Mīrghanī depicts him as leading an ascetic life, spending his time teaching and performing the rituals of the circumambulation etc; O'Fahey, *Enigmatic Saint*, 63.

17 *Ibid.*, 64.



unifying and society-building force.

If the views of Ibn Idrīs aroused opposition among the Meccan *‘ulamā’*, one should suppose that his teachings would be under much heavier attack after the arrival of the Wahhābīs in 1803. Strangely, this seems not to have been the case. A report by al-Mīrghanī states that Ibn Idrīs entered into direct contact with Sa‘ūd b. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz upon his arrival.<sup>18</sup> Surprising as it may seem, the fact is that during the ten years of Wahhābī occupation Ibn Idrīs continued to live and teach in Mecca. The Wahhābīs did not have a reputation of showing great tolerance towards people they considered unbelievers. That in this case they allowed a Sufī shaykh to continue his activity while others were harassed, expelled or even executed, is clearly a puzzle. The explanation may lie in the exact nature of what Ibn Idrīs actually taught in Mecca, but, as already stated, very little material exists to inform us on this. What we can do is to draw some loose comparisons between the Idrīsī set of teachings and Wahhābī doctrine.

Firstly, Ibn Idrīs had gained reputation as a learned teacher of the Koran and the Sunna. In his view, the scriptures were sources of law to which the scholar could, and should, apply his own intellect. This meant to oppose *taqlīd*, and opening for individual *ijtihād*. On this standpoint Ibn Idrīs and the Wahhābīs could agree. Secondly, the overall aim of reform was a common element of the Wahhābīs and Ibn Idrīs. For both this implied a process of purification of the faith. However, to Ibn Idrīs this was to happen within the framework of Sufism, to the Wahhābīs Sufism was one of the undesirable elements.

Significantly, Ibn Idrīs chose to leave Mecca for Upper Egypt in 1813 when another army entered the Ḥaramayn. This was the army of Muḥammad ‘Alī Pasha.

We do not know when Ibn Idrīs returned from Upper Egypt, but it seems that he was back in Mecca by the early 1820s. Then, in 1827-28 he left the Ḥijāz and travelled with his entourage southwards to the Yemen by ship.<sup>19</sup> Why he left is an open question. We do not know if he was expelled by the

18 *Ibid.*, 65.

19 O’Fahey, *Enigmatic Saint*, 78-9.

religious establishment or if he himself chose to go.

Why he chose the Yemen as his final home is another unanswered question. He had several Yemenis among his students in Mecca, and his contact with Yemen and 'Asīr may have been cultivated through these individuals. Ibn Idrīs himself states in a letter that he chose the Yemen because its people were highly praised by the Prophet for their faith and piety. He also states that 'the second reason was that the Yemen is closer to the Haramayn than elsewhere'.<sup>20</sup>

### *The students*

Ibn Idrīs was a scholar as well as a shaykh of the Sufi way and naturally much of his time was devoted to teaching, both the Islamic sciences and the mystical disciplines. In Mecca he recruited several students, individuals gathering around the master to take knowledge and guidance from him. One of his principal students was Muḥammad 'Uthmān al-Mīrghanī, who later founded the Khatmiyya, which was to become very influential in the Sudan. However, the one student who seems to have formed the closest relationship with Ibn Idrīs is Muḥammad b. 'Alī al-Sanūsī. He was to spread the teachings of Ibn Idrīs to new areas, and in so doing he elaborated the loose set of Idrīsī teachings into a highly structured *ṭarīqa*, or, one might call it, community. The development of the order he founded, the Sanusiyya, invites comparison with the process which led to the establishment of the Idrīsī state in the twentieth century.

### *Muhammad b. 'Alī al-Sanūsī*

Al Sanūsī was born in Algeria in December 1787.<sup>21</sup> He moved to Fez in 1805-06 to study at the Qarawiyyīn where he remained until possibly 1815. During his years in Fez he received a thorough Islamic education and reportedly took many *ṭarīqas*, mostly, but not all, from within the Shādhiliyya tradition. He also met al-Tijānī and some sources state that he was initiated

<sup>20</sup> Thomassen and Radtke, *Letters*, 169.

<sup>21</sup> Vikør, *Sufi and Scholar*, 22.

into the Tijāniyya.<sup>22</sup> In the period from 1815 to 1826 he completed his first pilgrimage and also spent some years in Cairo where he studied at al-Azhar. It seems that al-Sanūsī was still a *ṭālib*, a seeker, in these years, despite his considerable learning. However, the *quṭb*, the pole he was seeking was not to be found in Cairo but in Mecca. In 1826 he travelled to the Hijāz.<sup>23</sup>

Ziadeh describes the stay in Cairo as a disappointment to al-Sanūsī, for two reasons.<sup>24</sup> First the scholarly climate in Cairo was less stimulating than he had expected. Secondly, according to Ziadeh, his views were treated with scepticism by the 'ulamā'.<sup>25</sup>

Al-Sanūsī arrived in Mecca after Turco-Egyptian rule had been established there and the Wahhābīs eliminated as a military threat. He studied with many teachers there, but the most important influence was undoubtedly Ibn Idrīs. Although they cannot have spent more than about two years together in Mecca, their relationship apparently was one of great spiritual depth. Al-Sanūsī was Ibn Idrīs' principal student and when the ageing master left for the Yemen in 1827-28, he appointed al-Sanūsī his *khalīfa* in Mecca by saying 'Ibn al-Sanūsī is of us and we are of him. He is our *khalīfa* and stands in our place'.<sup>26</sup>

22 Vikør (*ibid.*, 60) points out that this may be possible. Only after the death of al-Tijānī did the Tijāniyya become an exclusive order, meaning that the members had to renounce other affiliations.

23 *Ibid.*, 89-90.

24 Nicola A. Ziadeh, *The Sanūsīyya. A study of a revivalist movement in Islam*, Leiden 1968, 39-40.

25 The alleged controversy between al-Sanūsī and the 'ulamā' of al-Azhar is not based on contemporary sources. There exist two *fatwās* (religious rulings) issued against al-Sanūsī by two shaykhs at the university, but both of these are of a later date (after 1840, that is long after al-Sanūsī left al-Azhar and after he had settled in Cyrenaica). These two *fatwās* are discussed by Vikør, *Sufi and Scholar*, 247-64.

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### *Muḥammad ʿUthmān al-Mīrghanī*

Al-Mīrghanī came from a Meccan family, and joined Ibn Idrīs during the latter's stay there.<sup>27</sup> Around 1815 the teacher sent the barely 20 year-old student on a brief missionary trip to Eritrea. When Ibn Idrīs left Mecca upon the arrival of Muḥammad ʿAlī's forces in 1813, al-Mīrghanī travelled with him to al-Zayniyya in Upper Egypt. From there he set out for the Sudan, against the advice of his master. Al-Mīrghanī stayed in the Sudan from approximately 1816 until 1822 (at the earliest), when he rejoined Ibn Idrīs in Mecca. While in the Sudan, al-Mīrghanī initiated numerous followers and built *zāwiyas* for them. There are some indications that the order established by al-Mīrghanī, the Khat-miyya, had already come into existence at this time.

From the correspondence between Ibn Idrīs and al-Mīrghanī in the Sudan we can piece together a picture of the relationship between the two men. Evidently, Ibn Idrīs showed little or no interest in the organisational achievements of al-Mīrghanī, rather his main concern was the spiritual development of his student. The picture is that of a mature shaykh trying to restrain his ambitious young student from losing sight of the spiritual goal: 'Understand, my son, that although the people of your time appear to be flattering you, their hearts are filled with feeble intentions, which will bring no profit with God'.<sup>28</sup>

### *Ibn Idrīs' final years in ʿAsīr*

The ageing shaykh (now approaching his eightieth year) arrived in Zabīd in 1243/1827-8 together with his following. Once there, Ibn Idrīs held teaching sessions both for his elite students and for the 'commoners'. The scholarly establishment of the Tihāma were mainly of the Shāfiʿī school whereas those in Ṣanʿāʾ were of the Zaydī persuasion.<sup>29</sup> Reports from al-Ḥasan b ʿĀkish, a

<sup>27</sup> On the life of Muḥammad ʿUthmān al-Mīrghanī, see Karrār, *Sufi brotherhoods*, Chapters 3 to 4, 42-102, and Thomassen and Radtke, *Letters*, Chapter 2, 42-117.

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student who joined Ibn Idrīs in Ṣabyā, indicate that both groups viewed the ageing master with great respect and sympathy.<sup>30</sup> Their teachings with regard to the *ijtihād/taqlīd* issue were relatively similar, a point which is emphasised by ʿĀkish who studied both with the *qāḍī* of Ṣanʿāʾ, Muḥammad b. ʿAlī al-Shawkānī (d. 1850) and with Ibn Idrīs in Ṣabyā. In this perspective the Yemeni ʿulamāʾ may be seen as a peripheral group, far from the scholarly establishment of Mecca or Cairo. As such, they were representatives of new, independent thinking. Ibn Idrīs was to them a celebrated teacher, propagating the same views. But, if the Yemeni scholars represented new ideas in contrast to the great centres like Mecca or Cairo, they certainly represented the local establishment compared to the Wahhābī sympathisers of the ʿAsīrī mountains. Thus, Ibn Idrīs encountered in the Yemen a different constellation from that in Mecca; this time he had the ʿulamāʾ on his side and the Wahhābīs as his opponents.

After his travels in the Tihāma, Ibn Idrīs travelled towards Abū ʿArīsh to settle there upon an invitation from the scholars of that town. While staying in Ṣabyā he learned that an Egyptian army was staying at Abū ʿArīsh which at the time was ruled by *sharīf* Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī Ḥaydar under Egyptian suzerainty. Apparently, the presence of Egyptian forces made Ibn Idrīs abandon his plans and instead settle in Ṣabyā with all his followers in January/February 1830.<sup>31</sup>

Ṣabyā was then under control of Ibn Mujaththil of the Banū Mughayd, and it may seem a bit of a puzzle that Ibn Idrīs chose to settle in a Wahhābī-oriented place where he was not really very welcome, given that he had friends all along the Tihāma. We must keep in mind that Ibn Idrīs had encountered less problems with the Wahhābīs in Mecca than with the ʿulamāʾ, particularly after the Turco-Egyptian take-over. With this background, it seems that the shaykh chose the lesser of two evils when he opted for Ṣabyā as his final home.<sup>32</sup>

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and tribal divisions, see Dresch, *Tribes, Government and History*, 1-16.

30 O'Fahey, *Enigmatic Saint*, 83-4 and 90-2.

31 *Ibid.*, 92-3.

32 Ibn Idrīs' decision to settle in Ṣabyā rather than the Tihāma may have

His arrival was bound to cause controversy among the local religious leaders.<sup>33</sup> Ibn Idrīs, despite his age, took up teaching as usual; Koran and Sunna as well as mystical texts and rituals. A local Wāḥḥābī, Ibn Surūr, reacted to the practices of Ibn Idrīs' followers and presented his accusations in a letter to the ruler Ibn Mujaththil. His allegations were a Wāḥḥābī's reaction to the beliefs and practices of the Sufis; their doctrines, rituals and moral conduct. The Idrīsī group were denounced for venerating their shaykh in a manner suitable to God alone, and for associating with marriageable women and young boys. Other allegations concerned the time of prayer, and the Sufi rituals were attacked for containing elements like games, dancing and handclapping as well as the raised voices in the chanting of the *dhikr*.

For Ibn Mujaththil, this was an embarrassment and an additional problem in an already tense political situation. He had to balance his position carefully between the Wāḥḥābīs in his own camp, the Tihāma 'ulamā', and the Egyptians with their military power. The picture 'Ākīsh creates of Ibn Mujaththil is that of a pragmatic leader confronted with the passions of his followers. Incidentally, the picture of Ibn Idrīs stands out as much the same; an elderly shaykh not always able to restrain his devotees.

To clear the matter a public debate was set in Ṣabyā in October/November 1832, and the event is recorded by 'Ākīsh who also states that Ibn Idrīs emerged the 'winner' of the controversy. The two sides consisted of the Tihāma 'ulamā' in support of Ibn Idrīs on the one side and the 'Asīrī Wāḥḥābī-oriented scholars on the other. In the debate itself the opponents of Ibn Idrīs brought forth their allegations which (according to 'Ākīsh) were elegantly defended by him.<sup>34</sup>

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a more practical aspect. Ṣabyā is situated in the mountains, and the climate is favourable compared to the extreme heat and humidity of the Tihāma. To the elderly and frail shaykh this may have been reason enough. New sources indicate that Ibn Idrīs took this into consideration; O'Fahey, personal communication.

<sup>33</sup> For Ibn Idrīs' controversy with the local Wāḥḥābīs, and the Ṣabyā debate, see O'Fahey, *Enigmatic Saint*, 98-106 and 'Games, dancing and handclapping. A Sufi controversy in South Arabia' in H. Palva and K.S. Vikør (eds.), *The Middle East: Unity and Diversity*, Copenhagen: NIAS Books 1993, 123-33.

<sup>34</sup> *Munāẓarat Sayyidi Aḥmad b. Idrīs (r) wa-fuqahā' al-Najdiyya*, ed. al-



Ibn Idrīs remained in Ṣabyā for the last five years of his life. He died there on 21 October 1837 in his eighty-seventh year.<sup>35</sup> He left behind numerous students and followers, besides al-Sanūsī and al-Mirghanī. A third prominent student who had joined Ibn Idrīs in ʿAsīr was the Sudanese Ibrāhīm al-Rashīd who stayed with the shaykh until the latter's death.<sup>36</sup>

Finally, Ibn Idrīs left behind his own sons; ʿAbd al-ʿĀl who was only seven years old, and Muḥammad al-Quṭb who was 36 years when his father died. The younger son, ʿAbd al-ʿĀl, reportedly had been left with al-Sanūsī as guardian and tutor in Mecca, but arrived in the Yemen together with al-Sanūsī upon learning of the master's death.<sup>37</sup>

ʿĀkish comments about events after the death of the Moroccan saint: 'After his death, his companions dispersed in different directions and that was the end of this blessed community'.<sup>38</sup>

As it will be seen in the following chapter, a definite end to the Idrīsīs in ʿAsīr it was not. The students may have set out 'in different directions', but the son, Muḥammad al-Quṭb stayed on. His life was to be a quiet one, yet from him derives the Idrīsī

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Hasan b. Ahmad ʿĀkish, Cairo n.d.

35 O'Fahey, *Enigmatic Saint*, 105.

36 On the life and background of Ibrāhīm al-Rashīd and his relation to Ibn Idrīs, see *ibid.*, 154-62. See also Karrār, *Sufi brotherhoods*, 103-5.

37 O'Fahey, *Enigmatic Saint*, 135. See also discussion by Vikør, *Sufi and Scholar*, 118 n. 45, on the question of which of the Idrīsī sons had stayed with al-Sanūsī in Mecca. If ʿAbd al-ʿĀl was only six or seven years old, he must have been born around 1830, i.e. after Ibn Idrīs came to the Yemen, and can thus not have been left with al-Sanūsī in Mecca. Yet, it is also unlikely that it should be Muḥammad al-Quṭb, a man approaching his thirties, who should stay in Mecca with al-Sanūsī as guardian. Also, Muḥammad al-Idrīsī, third generation Adārīsā in ʿAsīr, explicitly wrote that Muḥammad al-Quṭb was with his father in his last days; Muḥammad b. ʿAlī al-Idrīsī, *Risālat al-awrād al-Idrīsīyya*, Cairo 1978; referred to by Vikør, *ibid.*, 118n. One possible solution to this may be that the son who was left in Mecca was neither ʿAbd al-ʿĀl nor al-Quṭb, but another son, perhaps Muṣṭafā, who is said to have died young, shortly after his father's death; O'Fahey, *Enigmatic Saint*, 119 and Karrār, *Sufi Brotherhoods*, 54.

38 Quoted, O'Fahey, *Enigmatic Saint*, 106.

tradition in 'Asīr. From the same line came the most activist representative of the entire Idrīsī tradition, in the figure of Muḥammad al-Idrīsī.

*The teachings of Aḥmad b. Idrīs: Pointing towards political activism?*

To search for motives for political activism in the teachings of Aḥmad b. Idrīs is a difficult, if not impossible task, for the simple reason that no comprehensive overview of his teachings exists.<sup>39</sup> This study does not attempt to present a full analysis of possible political implications in the teachings of Ibn Idrīs. My intention is to describe the political activism of Muḥammad al-Idrīsī and the sequence of events constituting the rise and fall of the Idrīsī state. However, in order to present an analysis of the ideological foundations of this short-lived state, it is natural to turn to the teachings of the founder of the Idrīsī tradition. Can we point to any particular elements in the teachings of Ibn Idrīs which may be said to encourage political activism, and if so, which may have been part of the heritage of Muḥammad al-Idrīsī?

Political activism is often referred to as a hallmark of the 'Neo Sufi' orders, as opposed to the traditional ones, which were considered introvert, local-based, truly *mystical* orders with emphasis on the religious elements. But when describing this alleged activism authors often refer to *accomplishments* rather than to the actual teachings of the Sufi shaykhs. In the case of the Idrīsī tradition, its activism has often been described on the basis of the organisational and political aspects of the orders created by the Idrīsī students (al-Sanūsī in particular).

<sup>39</sup> The lack of any study of the writings from Ibn Idrīs (and other 'Neo-Sufis' such as his disciple al-Sanūsī) is pointed out by O'Fahey and Radtke, 'Neo-Sufism Reconsidered', 52-4. Several works have survived, but these are for the most part impersonal works such as Koran commentaries or *fiqh*. O'Fahey and Radtke argue that this type of writing does not reveal much about the author's motives, unless very closely studied. Since such study has yet to be done, the concept of 'Neo-Sufism' still derives largely from reports by French and Italian travellers and scholars, and not from the writings of the 'Neo-Sufis' themselves.

To accept this without question may lead us into a circular argument; *Because* its representatives were politically active, the Idrīsī teachings promote political activism. This does not necessarily have to be true. When any organisation or group chooses to take an active part in contemporary society, this may stem from a number of reasons, be they *ad hoc* (such as taking up the battle against invaders) or more general (such as trying to instigate a particular development or process). Political involvement may even be directly contrary to group-ideology, but takes place because of extraordinary events in the immediate society. In other words, the drive towards political activism may be seen as deriving from *socio-political* circumstances, not merely from some elements in the set of teachings adhered to.

Having said this, I shall nevertheless point to two aspects of Ibn Idrīs' teachings which, in my opinion, point in the direction of political activism; the insistence on *ijtihād* and the emphasis on missionary activity. In doing so, I emphasise that these aspects alone do not directly lead to outright political activism. Rather, they harbour a *tendency* towards activism which may or may not take place—depending on circumstances.

### *Ijtihād: Religious process with political implications?*

Muslim scholars declared the 'gates of *ijtihād*' closed in the 10-eleventh century, after a process which resulted in the consolidation of the Law, the *sharī'a*.<sup>40</sup> The task of the ruler would now be to implement God's will on earth, that is to maintain legislation based on the *sharī'a*. Gradually, this became more an ideal than a reality. The Divine Law was, little by little, undermined in everyday practice, as the rules proved difficult to implement in full.

How did the 'ulamā' react to this development? Most scholars adopted what has been termed the 'traditionalist'

40 There are several historical works concerned with the development of Islamic Law and the process of *ijtihād*. In the present section, discussion is based on the following works: John Esposito, *Islam: The Straight Path*, Oxford 1988 and Daniel Pipes, *In the Path of God. Islam and Political Power*, New York 1983.

attitude; they accepted the actual state of affairs and chose instead to press for gradual reforms. Their attitude was justified by an overriding will to preserve the Islamic community—despite its imperfections. Consequently, the scholarly class would support the ruler by keeping quiet. This balance of mutual dependency between religious and worldly leaders has been termed ‘the Medieval Synthesis’.<sup>41</sup>

This Medieval Synthesis was a power-balance designed to preserve the *status quo* and as such it prevailed until the arrival of the Western powers in the nineteenth century. Yet, even before this there were calls for breaking this well-established pattern, one of the loudest being that of Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb. As we have seen, he called for *ijtihād*, for a new interpretation of the sources (*uṣūl al-fiqh*). Later came Sufi leaders like Ibn Idrīs, calling for the individuals’ right to interpret the Koran and the Sunna.

How could the call for *ijtihād* have political implications? As mentioned, the mutual dependency between ‘*ulamā*’ and sultan was one designed to preserve—to maintain a society that had proved to work. The call for *ijtihād* implied a new dynamism as the Wahhābīs rejected the idea of compromise to sustain a larger good. To undertake a new process of *ijtihād* meant to reject, not only the Medieval Synthesis, but also the early scholars as absolute authorities. The Law was laid down for ever, yes, but individuals should be free to interpret the sources to the ability of their intellect. In its final consequence the call for *ijtihād* embodied a rejection of all authority save that of God.

As a final remark on this subject, it should be noted that the teachings of Ibn Idrīs insisted on *ijtihād*.<sup>42</sup> This does not mean, however, that the political implications described above were an overt element in his teachings (Ibn Idrīs remained essentially a religious mystic, he was by no means a political leader). What may be stressed is the ‘liberating’ effect of the call for *ijtihād*. To be free to apply one’s intellect to Revelation could, in the next step, mean freedom to question the existing structure of society. Thus, the ‘Neo-Sufi’ orders contained an element that made political activism *possible*, but not necessarily inevitable.

41 Pipes, *In the Path of God*, 57-63.

42 See discussion by O’Fahey, *Enigmatic Saint*, 73-5 and 199-200.

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42 See discussion by O’Fahey, *Enigmatic Saint*, 73-5 and 199-200.

*Missionary activity: Religious activism with political consequences?*

The teachings of Ibn Idrīs contained an impulse towards missionary activity. The Way of Ibn Idrīs was spread both by himself and his students during his lifetime, most notably in Upper Egypt and the Sudan. That such an impulse existed is shown by Ibn Idrīs' own life and by his sending off students to other lands, such as the young al-Mīrghānī being sent to Eritrea.<sup>43</sup>

To spread his Way would necessarily mean establishing groups of followers in regions where other forms of local organisation prevailed. Since Idrīsī missionary activity for the most part took place in areas away from the great centres of learning,<sup>44</sup> the Idrīsī representatives did not have to face the hostility of the 'ulamā'. Also, regions like Eritrea and the Sudan were Muslim, but with more elements of local custom incorporated into Islamic practice and belief. The power-balance described above was present, but on a smaller scale than was the case in the Islamic heartlands.

It seems that in the view of Ibn Idrīs himself, the spreading of his Sufi way was entirely unconnected to any form of organisation or social structure; his missionary imperative was solely a religious activity.<sup>45</sup> To build a *zāwiya* for the followers meant

43 The impulse towards missionary activity is perhaps more evident from the *acts* of Ibn Idrīs than his writings, as he sent his students to teach the Way in other lands. However, the same impulse can be found in the personal correspondence of Ibn Idrīs, where he gives advice and help to his students 'in the field'. See for instance Thomassen and Radtke, *Letters*, 71, where Ibn Idrīs instructs al-Mīrghānī on the *dhikr* to teach to the brethren in the Sudan (even though he at first tried to discourage al-Mīrghānī from going there).

44 With the exception of the Yemen which held a strong scholarly tradition of its own, with learning centres and many renowned scholars.

45 In the letters from Ibn Idrīs to al-Mīrghānī (Thomassen and Radtke, *Letters*, 42-117) one may read—if only between the lines—the difference in attitude between the master and the student. O'Fahey discusses these differences in *Enigmatic Saint*, 142-53, deducing from the letters that the master attempted to restrain his student from his tendency to overt activism among people, and a return to the spiritual striving towards knowledge or illumination.

exactly that; a centre for religious devotion and nothing more. However, it proved difficult to dissociate religious activism from some sort of social organisation, especially in societies where central leadership was weak or absent. Al-Sanūsī's work among the nomads of Cyrenaica is a striking example. There the Way became more than a new system of *dhikr* and prayer; it became a new focus for social organisation.

The teachings of Ibn Idrīs may not have contained elements of overt political activism, but it did contain elements of religious activism—to spread the knowledge of this particular Sufi path to new followers. An imperative to one form of activism (religious) may lead to another (political), but it does not necessarily have to do so. Again, the prevailing circumstances in a surrounding society will be decisive as to whether or not the missionary turns community- or even state-builder. This should be kept in mind when we later discuss the foundations of the Idrīsī state in ʿAsīr.

THE ADĀRISA QUIESCENT:  
MUḤAMMAD AL-QUṬB AND ʿALĪ B. MUḤAMMAD  
IN ʿASĪR

It is unclear whether Ibn Idrīs' principal students, al-Sanūsī and al-Mīrghanī, were with him in his last days before his death on 21 October 1837.<sup>1</sup> The leader of the Idrīsī followers in Ṣabyā seems to have been the Sudanese Ibrāhīm al-Rashīd, who was around twenty-five years old in 1837. The relation between these three men has been described as one of rivalry, implying that the death of Ibn Idrīs triggered some sort of succession dispute.<sup>2</sup> Whether or not we are dealing with a succession dispute in the conventional sense, it is still extraordinary that the eldest son, Muḥammad al-Quṭb, never put himself forth as a potential leader of the Idrīsī group.

He seems to have been content to leave the leadership to al-Rashīd, despite the fact that the latter was almost ten years his junior. It seems clear that Muḥammad al-Quṭb regarded Ibrāhīm al-Rashīd as his father's true successor.<sup>3</sup> Shortly after the death

- 1 Vikør states that al-Sanūsī was in Mecca when his master died; Vikør, *Sufi and Scholar*, 118. With regard to al-Mīrghanī, O'Fahey points to the fact that he is not mentioned by ʿĀkish among those accompanying Ibn Idrīs to Ṣabyā (*Enigmatic Saint*, 153). On the other hand, Karrār states that al-Mīrghanī did follow his master to Ṣabyā; *Sufi Brotherhoods*, 61.
- 2 On the question of a succession dispute, see Karrār, *Sufi Brotherhoods*, 54-5; O'Fahey, *Enigmatic Saint*, 113-19 and Vikør, *Sufi and Scholar*, 119.
- 3 Karrār writes (*Sufi Brotherhoods*, 54) that Muḥammad al-Quṭb regarded al-Rashīd as his father's true successor 'because his father used to authorize him to lead prayers in his absence'. Whatever the reasons for al-Quṭb's support of al-Rashīd, it may just as well be linked to al-Quṭb's own unwillingness to take on the leadership of the Idrīsī followers.



of Ibn Idrīs, al-Rashīd left the Yemen and travelled extensively in the Hījāz, Jerusalem, Libya, Upper Egypt and the Sudan.<sup>4</sup>

The information we have about these two figures is not extensive, if the life of Muḥammad al-Quṭb can be said to be veiled in obscurity, this is even more true with regard to his son 'Alī. The contrast between these two and the latter's son, Muḥammad al-Idrīsī, could not be greater. It may, however, be possible to place of the 'Asīrī branch in the wider Idrīsī network.

### *Muhammad al-Quṭb*

Muḥammad al-Quṭb, sometimes called al-Ghawth, was born in 1218/1803-4.<sup>5</sup> After his father's death, Muḥammad al-Quṭb lived for the rest of his days in al-Ḥudayda.<sup>6</sup> Only shortly before his death on 23 Rajab 1306/25 March 1889 did he return to Ṣabyā, where he was buried next to his father.<sup>7</sup> About his life in al-Ḥudayda, nothing is known, except that it was uneventful. The image conveyed is that of a man preferring solitude and spiritual contemplation. Al-'Aqīlī writes about Muḥammad al-Quṭb that he spent his life in obscurity (*al-khumūl*), piety (*al-ṣalāḥ*) and nearness to God (*iqbāl 'alā Allāh*).<sup>8</sup> There are some indications, given by O'Fahey, that Muḥammad al-Quṭb was a recognized teacher in his time.<sup>9</sup>

According to Amin Rihani, who visited 'Asīr in 1923,

1 O'Fahey, *Enigmatic Saint*, 159. Karrār indicates that al-Rashīd left the Yemen to avoid the succession dispute; *Sufī Brotherhoods*, 104.

2 The most detailed account of the Adārīsa after Ibn Idrīs' death is given in a privately-published biography of Ibn Idrīs and his descendants by Aḥmad b. Muṣṭafā al-Idrīsī, *Al-sayyid Aḥmad b. Idrīs*, Luxor 1406/1986. Unless otherwise indicated, birth and death dates are given on the authority of this work.

3 O'Fahey, *Enigmatic Saint*, 120, referring to Farūq 'Uthmān Abāza, *al-Ukūm al-'Uthmānī fī 'l-Yaman*, Beirut 1979, 196. See also al-'Aqīlī, *Ta'rīkh al-Mikhlāf al-Sulaymānī*, II, 624-5, and al-Shahhārī, *al-Muṭāmi' al-tawassu'iyya*, 25.

4 Al-'Aqīlī, *Ta'rīkh al-Mikhlāf al-Sulaymānī*, II, 625. See also O'Fahey, *Enigmatic Saint*, 120.

5 Al-'Aqīlī, *Ta'rīkh al-Mikhlāf al-Sulaymānī*, II, 625.

6 See O'Fahey, *Enigmatic Saint*, 121.

Muḥammad al-Quṭb married a Sudanese slave woman, a practice not uncommon in the Tihāma, and she gave birth to his son ʿAlī.<sup>10</sup> We do not know of any other marriages contracted by Muḥammad al-Quṭb, nor about any other sons or daughters.

A letter from Muḥammad al-Quṭb to Ibrāhīm al-Rashīd survives, and indicates that the relationship remained good between the two men.<sup>11</sup> The letter refers to a visit to Ṣabyā by some of the Rashīdī brethren and comments that the community there was growing; whether as a result of missionary activity or the attraction of Ibn Idrīs' tomb, we do not know.

### ʿAlī b. Muḥammad

About the life of ʿAlī, we possess no contemporary sources. The little that we know about him derives from later records, and even these consist only of a few lines.<sup>12</sup>

ʿAlī b. Muḥammad was born in 1250/1834-5. According to al-ʿAqīlī, he 'sought knowledge from the shaykhs of his age and succeeded his father in his spiritual centre (*markazuhu 'l-rūḥī*)'. Furthermore he mingled little with people (*qalīl ikhtilāṭ bi'l-nās*). Al-ʿAqīlī writes that ʿAlī spent his life in isolation, interrupted by one month's break approximately every second year. Finally 'he remained in his retreat (*ʿuzlatuhu*) until death reached him on 17 Dhū 'l-Ḥijja 1324 [2 February 1907]' and 'he left behind four sons: Muḥammad, al-Ḥasan, Aḥmad and Ḥusayn'.<sup>13</sup>

It appears that ʿAlī married a woman of Indian origin. According to Rihani and Stuhlmann, she was the one who gave birth to his eldest son Muḥammad.<sup>14</sup> We do not know of other marriages contracted by ʿAlī b. Muḥammad and it is unclear whether the four sons listed above were by the same mother.

10 Amin Rihani, *Around the Coasts of Arabia*, 165.

11 Referred to by O'Fahey, *Enigmatic Saint*, 121.

12 Al-ʿAqīlī, 625; Stuhlmann; 87, Rihani, *Around the Coasts*, 165. See also report by Rihani in Sinclair, *Documents*, 77 and 79.

13 Al-ʿAqīlī, *Ta'rikh al-Mikhlāf al-Sulaymānī*, II, 625.

14 Rihani, *Around the Coasts of Arabia*, 165, and Stuhlmann, *Kampf um Arabien*, 87. According to Stuhlmann, ʿAlī b. Muḥammad married the daughter of a common man, Naṣr Allāh Senedri. The name Senedri suggests an origin somewhere on the Subcontinent.

*The Adārisa of ʿAsīr: their place in the Idrīsī tradition*

Despite our lack of information about the lives and activities of ʿAsīrī Adārisa in the nineteenth century, it seems fair to conclude that both Muḥammad al-Qutb and ʿAlī b. Muḥammad were clear representatives of a quietist line within the Idrīsī tradition. In this respect they differ greatly from the common notion of the Idrīsī tradition as an activist, 'Neo-Sufi' movement.<sup>15</sup> In order to focus on the Adārisa of ʿAsīr, we must turn to the development of the rest of the Idrīsī tradition, which was mainly located in Africa.

*The Ṭarīqa Muḥammadiyya Aḥmadiyya Idrīsīyya: The Adārisa of Egypt and Sudan and the Adārisa of ʿAsīr*

The younger son of Ibn Idrīs, ʿAbd al-ʿĀl, stayed for eleven years in the Yemen after his father's death.<sup>16</sup> Then, around the age of eighteen, he joined al-Sanūsī in Mecca and accompanied him on his travels to Upper Egypt and to Libya. ʿAbd al-ʿĀl stayed with al-Sanūsī in Jaghbūb until the latter's death, whereupon he left for Egypt and the Idrīsī lodge at al-Zayniyya. There he stayed for twelve years, fathering nine sons. It was in this period that ʿAbd al-ʿĀl developed his father's teachings into an order—a *ṭarīqa*, which was formally called Ṭarīqa Muḥammadiyya Aḥmadiyya Idrīsīyya.<sup>17</sup> We do not know

15 See O'Fahey and Radtke, 'Neo-Sufism reconsidered', 81-6, for a discussion of activism vs. quietism with regard to the Idrīsī tradition. The authors argue that the image of the Idrīsī-derived orders as activist has been preserved through colonial literature and documents. In the eyes of Western observers, the orders were activist because they engaged in contact—as resisters or collaborators—with the colonial rulers. O'Fahey and Radtke conclude that this is not political activism, merely a response to events which forced themselves upon them. To this one may argue that it must have taken a certain degree of activism (religious or political, depending on the point of view) to build an organisation capable of responding to events of this nature; *ibid.*, 84.

16 On the early life of ʿAbd al-ʿĀl, see O'Fahey, *Enigmatic Saint*, 125-7 and Karrār, *Sufi Brotherhoods*, 116-18.

17 Karrār, *ibid.*, 116. Not to be confused with the Idrīsī tradition, which is not an order, nor with the Adārisa, which means the Idrīsī

exactly when this *ṭarīqa* came into existence.

In 1877 ʿAbd al-ʿĀl left al-Zayniyya together with his eldest son Muḥammad, and the two travelled to the Sudan, intending to continue to ʿAsīr. However, they remained for a year in Dongola, where ʿAbd al-ʿĀl died in 1878.<sup>18</sup>

Muḥammad (al-Sharīf) b. ʿAbd al-ʿĀl stayed on in the Sudan where he propagated the Idrīsiyya order in the northern regions of that country. In so doing, he could rely on the considerable prestige his family held as descendants of Ibn Idrīs and possessors of *baraka*.<sup>19</sup> However, it does not appear that Muḥammad al-Sharīf sought to transform this prestige into political influence and the order has remained a relatively quietist one up to the present day. Typically, we find that Muḥammad al-Sharīf chose to stay in al-Zayniyya in Egypt during the Mahdist period of the Sudan (1885-98). Thereafter he returned to the Sudan where he lived until his death in 1936.

From the above summary, we may conclude that both ʿAbd al-ʿĀl and his son Muḥammad al-Sharīf engaged in a certain degree of activism; founding a *ṭarīqa* and spreading it to new regions. This type of activity can hardly be called *political* activism, in the sense that the Idrīsiyya took on worldly functions or took part in political issues of the day.<sup>20</sup> Rather, we may refer to their activities as religious activism: prozelytizing the faith in accordance with the missionary imperative embodied in the Idrīsī tradition.

Was the ʿAsīrī branch of the Idrīsī family also involved in the diffusion of the Idrīsiyya? If so, to what degree did they actively spread the order in ʿAsīr? Karrār states that the Adārīsa of ʿAsīr participated in the consolidation and spreading of the Idrīsiyya in the Yemen and parts of Muslim Asia.<sup>21</sup> To what

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descendants only.

18 *Ibid.*, 118.

19 *Ibid.*, 116.

20 'The Idrīsiyya in the Sudan at least has remained a relatively quietist order with little involvement in politics by comparison with, for example, the Khatmiyya'; O'Fahey, *Enigmatic Saint*, 127-8.

21 Karrār, *Sufī Brotherhood*, 116-17: 'It was Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. Idrīs and his descendants who was responsible for the spread of the Idrīsiyya in the Yemen and in parts of Muslim Asia, whereas his

extent this meant actively organizing and leading the new *ṭarīqa*, is another matter. From the little knowledge we have of the careers and personalities of Muḥammad al-Quṭb and ʿAlī, it seems that their roles were not those of missionaries or leaders. This, however, does not have to mean that the Idrīsiyya was not spread in ʿAsīr or in the Yemenī Tihāma. The attraction of the great shaykh's tomb in Ṣabyā and the presence of several local devotees, such as al-Ḥasan b. ʿĀkish, who died in 1874, may well have contributed to the spreading of the Way. If this was so, we do not know what was spread; the loose set of Idrīsī teachings centred on the master's prayers or the Ṭarīqa Idrīsiyya as developed by the Egyptian/Sudanese branch of the Adārisa. The fact is that with the sources presently available, we simply cannot say very much.

#### *The Sanūsiyya and the Adārisa in ʿAsīr*

After the death of Ibn Idrīs, al-Sanūsī returned to Mecca, where he stayed until 1840 having founded a lodge there.<sup>22</sup> He then travelled westwards to Cairo, the Siwa oasis and then into Cyrenaica, where he settled, probably in 1841, after a brief trip further westwards.

There he first established a lodge at al-Bayḍāʾ near Benghazi on the coast. From there al-Sanūsī undertook extensive travelling, visiting many tribes and founding lodges among them. In the course of a relatively short period, he attracted many new followers among several tribes.

In 1854, al-Sanūsī returned to Cyrenaica, after a new, eight-year long, stay in the Ḥijāz. He was then accompanied by Ibn Idrīs' son ʿAbd al-ʿĀl. Once there, al-Sanūsī founded a

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brother ʿAbd al-ʿĀl and the latter's son Muḥammad, were responsible for its propagation in Upper Egypt, the Sudan and other parts of Muslim Africa'.

<sup>22</sup> On the activities of al-Sanūsī after the death of Ibn Idrīs and the founding of the order in Cyrenaica, see Vikør, *Sufi and Scholar*, 132-61 and Vikør, 'Mystics in the Desert. The Sanūsiyya and the Sahara' in Palva and Vikør, *The Middle East—Unity and Diversity*, 133-45. See also E.E. Evans-Pritchard, *The Sanusi of Cyrenaica*, Oxford 1954, 11-19.

centre for the order at the small oasis of Jaghbūb, where he died in September 1859, leaving two young sons; Muḥammad al-Mahdī of fifteen and Muḥammad al-Sharīf of thirteen years old.

Upon the death of al-Sanūsī, there seems to have been some discussion among the brethren as to who was going to lead the order. Apparently, Ibn Idrīs' son, ʿAbd al-ʿĀl, was suggested as leader, at least temporarily until al-Sanūsī's eldest son reached maturity, but this was rejected and the succession passed to the young Muḥammad al-Mahdī. The suggestion of ʿAbd al-ʿĀl to the leadership can be seen as a continuation of the spiritual authority of Ibn Idrīs in the Sanūsiyya.<sup>23</sup>

By the time of al-Sanūsī's death, his order was firmly established in Cyrenaica. But what order was this? A new *ṭarīqa* or a continuation of the Idrīsī tradition? It is unclear when the Sanūsiyya was established as an order of its own and no longer carried the name of Aḥmad b. Idrīs. In any event, the name Sanūsiyya was never used by the brethren themselves in al-Sanūsī's lifetime. Rather, they used the term *ṭarīqa al-Muḥammadiyya* and the teachings and rituals were those inherited from Ibn Idrīs.<sup>24</sup>

In one aspect the brotherhood in Cyrenaica did differ greatly from the group around Ibn Idrīs; in its organisation. Ibn Idrīs did not head an order, rather it is more correct to say that he was the undisputed spiritual leader among a group of students.<sup>25</sup> The followers joining al-Sanūsī in Cyrenaica were organized into a highly structured pattern, and it is this organisational aspect that is typical of the Sanūsiyya.<sup>26</sup>

The heart and core of the Sanūsiyya in Cyrenaica were the local *zāwiyas*, lodges.<sup>27</sup> These were centres for religious education and spreading of the Sufi way, and they were organised along a uniform pattern.<sup>28</sup> From the lodge there was formed a

23 Vikør, *Sufia and Scholar*, 120-1 and O'Fahey, *Enigmatic Saint*, 126.

24 Vikør, *ibid.*, 143.

25 See Karrār, *Sufi Orders*, 51, using the term *al-madrasa al-Idrīsīyya*, the Idrīsī school, of the group of students around Ibn Idrīs.

26 Vikør, *Sufi and Scholar*, 143-4.

27 Approximately 60 lodges were founded during the lifetime of al-Sanūsī; Vikør, *ibid.*, 184.

28 Each lodge had a mosque, or a place of prayer in the smallest ones.

network with the surrounding, largely nomadic, peoples. An important function of the lodge was to receive and house traders, thus the lodge became also a centre for trade and commercial activity, not only for the people living in the *zāwiya*, but also for the surrounding tribes.

When the central lodge was set up at Jaghbūb, it became a 'Sanūsī capital' where the central leadership stayed. Its principal function was still to provide Islamic education and instruction in the Sufi way, but at Jaghbūb the teachings were on a higher level.<sup>29</sup> Each year, leaders of the local lodges, the shaykhs, would assemble at the central lodge at Jaghbūb and give reports from their units directly to the central leadership.<sup>30</sup>

In sum, the structure of the Sanūsīyya order was marked by great centralization, all decisions were ultimately taken by the head of the order in council with his closest companions. However, it was also a structure marked by great simplicity; there were few intermediary levels between the local *shaykhs* and the central leaders. This is also signified by the uniform layout and organisation of each *zāwiya*; no lodge was to have greater importance or authority than another.

Having described the organisation of the Sanūsīyya in the nineteenth century, we turn now to the Adārisa in 'Asīr. The Sanūsīyya is one example (of several) of political activism originating from within a Sufi framework, and it invites comparison with the Adārisa of 'Asīr mainly because of the close family links between the two groups.

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There was also a school for children and facilities for students, whom would come from the neighbouring peoples who were encouraged to send their young to be educated with the order. Within the lodge there were special quarters for the officials and the brethren. In addition, each lodge had a guesthouse, a shelter for the poor and houses for the servants. To each lodge was connected a bakery, stables, storehouses and a garden. Thus, the structure of the lodge reflected its primary function—the promotion of piety—but also its more practical sides. For details on the pattern of the Sanūsī lodges, see *ibid.*, 189-92.

<sup>29</sup> The shaykhs at the local lodges were only permitted to instruct the students in the initial stages of the Sufi way. After that, promising students were encouraged to go to Jaghbūb to continue their education there; *ibid.*, 194.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 197.

It seems reasonably fair to conclude that Muḥammad al-Quṭb and ʿAlī b. Muḥammad did not engage in any sort of organisational activity comparable to that of the Sanūsiyya.<sup>31</sup> As pointed out above, the spreading of the Idrīsiyya in ʿAsīr would not necessarily have to happen through the deliberate activity of the Idrīsī descendants, but rather through the students and devotees who had stayed with Ibn Idrīs. In this regard, the son and grandson of Ibn Idrīs would function as remote spiritual heads. There are some indications that this took place. One is the letter from Ibrāhīm al-Rashīd<sup>32</sup> which comments that the Šabyā community is growing. Another is the information that ʿAbd al-ʿĀl and his son intended to travel to ʿAsīr when they eventually settled in Dongola, perhaps to participate in spreading the *ṭarīqa* there.<sup>33</sup>

If we assume that the Idrīsiyya *was* propagated in ʿAsīr, we

- 31 This conclusion is drawn upon the general reclusive image conveyed of the two figures. Again, it must be emphasized that we possess no contemporary evidence neither for or against such an assumption. Later accounts, written after the establishment of the Idrīsī state, have tried to convey a picture of Muhammad al-Quṭb and ʿAlī as slowly building an organisation which then in turn became the Idrīsī state. See for instance Amin Rihani: '...the son of the new *wali*, Saiyed Muhammad, assumed, reluctantly at first, the double role of prince and priest. The shrine became a throne, and through the channels of the new faith flowed the controlling influences of the new civil power. Openly and secretly, the Idrisis fought the Sherifs of Abu 'Arish and finally triumphed over them. They then aroused the tribes, who had joined the Ahmadiyah cult, against the Turks, and the struggle for supremacy continued for many years. Meanwhile, they were enjoying the fruits of their spiritual power, and this, together with the fortune they had amassed, gave them the whip-hand over their enemies'; Amin Rihani, *Around the Coasts*, 164. This account of events is evidently written with hindsight, as an attempt to explain the success of Muḥammad al-Idrīsī. Yet, we shall not disregard the fact that Rihani's information derives from personal interviews with al-Idrīsī. It should be pointed out that, as we have seen, the major part of ʿAsīrī resistance against Ottoman rule in nineteenth-century ʿAsīr was led by the Mughaydis of the ʿAsīrī highlands, and not by the Idrīsīs. Al-Zulfa makes no mention of the Idrīsī family in this connection and he makes no mention of any connection between the Idrīsīs and the Wahhābī-oriented Mughaydis.

32 Referred to above.

33 See above.



must also seek some explanations for why it (apparently) was not developed into an organized structure reminiscent of the Sanū-siyya.

Firstly, there are the personalities of the figures involved to consider. It seems that neither Muḥammad al-Quṭb nor his son possessed the missionary zeal combined with the sense of organisation and expansionist ambitions displayed by al-Sanūsī and his son.

However, as a second explanation we must also consider the difference between the two societies, Cyrenaica and ʿAsīr. The Sanūsī organisation was primarily geared towards promoting learning among the tribal population in Cyrenaica, but the spreading of the order gradually changed the social system of the beduin, and the order became the dominant social force in the region.<sup>34</sup> This development was possible because of three factors. Firstly, the Sanūsiyya enjoyed fairly good relations with the Ottoman governors in Tripolitania and could thus continue their mission without hindrance from the formal overlords.<sup>35</sup> Secondly, in the interior of Cyrenaica, and the regions further south, towards Kufra, Ottoman overlordship was in name only. Here, the only form of social organisation was tribal.<sup>36</sup> Thus, as the Sanūsī leaders moved into the region, they had no serious 'competitors' at the level of social organisation and gradually the order, deliberately or not, established itself as an overriding superstructure, integrated into the tribal population.

A third point which facilitated the development of the Sanū-siyya, were the Trans-Saharan trade routes.<sup>37</sup> Many (although not all) of the Sanūsī lodges were established on caravan routes crossing the Cyrenaican plateau and the desert further south, so

<sup>34</sup> See Vikør, *Sufi and Scholar*, 205.

<sup>35</sup> Vikør, *ibid.*, 208-10. There are some indication that the Sanūsī lodges were exempt from taxes. See *ibid.*, 145-7, for the history of Ottoman involvement in Tripolitania and Cyrenaica. Direct Ottoman control was re-established in Tripolitania in 1835. After that, there followed some Cyrenaican resistance to Ottoman rule, but was from from the cities of Benghazi and Derna and was quickly crushed. See also Evans-Pritchard, *Sanusi*, 90-103.

<sup>36</sup> See Evans-Pritchard, *Sanusi*, 29-61.

<sup>37</sup> See Vikør, *Sufi and Scholar*, 186-7 and Evans-Pritchard, *Sanusi*, 78.

as to provide the lodge with additional livelihood. This again led to further integration with the local population of the area, increased income for the lodges and strengthened the role of the Sanūsī network.

If we compare these three factors with the society in nineteenth-century °Asīr, we find considerable differences. First of all, there was no stable, but nominal, overlordship comparable to that of the Ottomans in Cyrenaica. As we have seen, in the period 1840-49 after the Egyptian withdrawal, there was no well-established ruler who could serve as shield for the spreading of the Idrīsiyya. After the Ottoman invasion in 1849 and in the subsequent decades, there was no unity or stability in the Ottoman rule in °Asīr; rather the Ottoman presence in °Asīr had the nature of a continuous field expedition. Secondly, even if representatives of the Idrīsī tradition in °Asīr did engage in activities to establish lodges or learning centres throughout the region, they would not have operated in a society organized only according to tribal lineage. There were already rulers of °Asīr; in the Tihāma there was the *sharīf* of Abū °Arīsh and in the highlands there were the Mughaydīs, both based on a system of tribal allegiance.

As for the third point relating to trade, it would have been equally difficult for a newly-established Idrīsiyya order to obtain control over influence of the trading activities in °Asīr. Most of °Asīrī trade was the export and import of goods going through the main port cities along the Red Sea coast.<sup>38</sup> These cities were controlled, first by the *sharīf* of Abū °Arīsh and later by the Ottomans, who again determined the level of taxes in the ports. In addition, trade in specific goods were often the exclusive privilege of one tribe, like the Rijāl al-Mā° who controlled arms imports.

In sum, if we compare the Sanūsīyya of Cyrenaica with the Adārīsa in °Asīr we find quite different political and social circumstances. This, paired with a lack of missionary and administrative drive in the two first generations Adārīsa, are two factors which can explain why we do not find the Adārīsa of °Asīr undertaking a 'routinization of charisma' such as soon

38 On the trade structure of °Asīr, see Cornwallis, *Asir before World War I*, 19-20.

became evident in the case of the Sanūsiyya.<sup>39</sup> As the century turned, these two factors were altered and from the quietist line of the Adārisa in ʿAsīr came the most activist representative of the Idrīsī tradition.

<sup>39</sup> On the concept 'routinization of charisma', see discussion by O'Fahey, *Enigmatic Saint*, 114, and Vikør, *Sufi and Scholar*, 272. Here, the concept means the transforming of religious prestige into worldly influence, be that political and/or economic. Having said that this process was not undertaken by the Adārisa in nineteenth-century ʿAsīr, it must again be said that we are lacking in contemporary sources. As indicated by Rihani (above) this process may well have taken place, but on a very small scale. If the process had taken place on a larger scale, we could have expected to find references to the Adārisa also in general accounts of ʿAsīr in this period.

## THE RISE OF THE IDRĪSĪ STATE AND ITS PART IN THE FIRST WORLD WAR, 1907–1918

The rise of the Idrīsī state can be seen as a continuation of the tribal rebellions against Turkish rule, described in Chapter Two. Before Muḥammad al-Idrīsī returned to ʿAsīr, there seems to have been no unifying factor present among the population in the Tihāma. In the course of the period leading up to the First World War, Muḥammad al-Idrīsī was to become one such unifying factor, leading resistance against the Ottoman governors in ʿAsīr. To such an extent did he succeed in his military and diplomatic campaign against the Turks, that by the outbreak of the war we can speak about a separate entity called the Idrīsī state of ʿAsīr.

### *Muḥammad al-Idrīsī*

The Idrīsī state in ʿAsīr was the creation of this single man, Muḥammad b. ʿAlī al-Idrīsī, great-grandson of Aḥmad b. Idrīs. Muḥammad al-Idrīsī was the representative of the Idrīsī tradition who stood for the most clear-cut activism. He took on a leadership which can only be described as political; establishing a separate government and leading military campaigns. The history of the Idrīsī state is closely connected to the life of its founder, who is as difficult to label as the state itself. To start the investigation of the Idrīsī state, it is appropriate to begin with the early career of this man of apparent opposites; a Sufi yet clearly an activist; a man of religion, yet prepared to cooperate with infidel powers; a learned scholar, yet appealing to the masses of ʿAsīr.

Muḥammad b. ʿAlī b. Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. Idrīs (sometimes called al-Yamanī) is here called Muḥammad al-Idrīsī. He

was born in Ṣabyā in 1293/1876.<sup>1</sup> As stated above in Chapter Three, his mother is said to have been of Indian origin, and he had three brothers, although it is unknown if by the same mother.<sup>2</sup>

Muḥammad al-Idrīsī grew up in his father's house in Ṣabyā. Much of what we know about his early years derives from the account by Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-°Aqīlī.<sup>3</sup> Al-°Aqīlī starts by stating that Muḥammad al-Idrīsī spent his early years under the 'best conditions'.<sup>4</sup> He received his first education at home in Ṣabyā, and he learnt the Koran by heart. Then he started to study the disciplines of religious science and philology under the learned Sālim b. °Abd al-Raḥmān Bāṣuhī of Ṣabyā.<sup>5</sup> Al-°Aqīlī states that he continued his education at Abū °Arīsh where he studied under the supervision of Ismā'il b. Ḥasan °Ākish.<sup>6</sup> He is also said to have married there. After his stay at Abū °Arīsh he returned to Ṣabyā where he stayed for a brief period.

In 1313/1895-6 he set out from °Asīr to the port of Masawwa° in Eritrea. Why he undertook this journey is unclear, but al-°Aqīlī indicates that the Italian staff in the colony of Eritrea

<sup>1</sup> All Arabic sources available to me give 1293/1876 as Muḥammad al-Idrīsī's year of birth. None, however, give a more precise date. See al-°Aqīlī, *Ta'rikh al-Mikhlāf al-Sulaymānī*, II, 626; al-Nu°nī, *Ta'rikh °Asīr*, 222, and °Abd Allāh b. °Alī b. Musfir, *al-Sirāj al-munīr fī sirat umarā' °Asīr*, Beirut 1398/1978, 109. Stuhlmann, *Kampf um Arabien*, 87, states that he was born in 1878, but this must be regarded as wrong.

See above, Chapter Four.

<sup>3</sup> Al-°Aqīlī, *Ta'rikh al-Mikhlāf al-Sulaymānī*, II, 626-9. See also the account by al-Shahhārī, *al-Maṭāmi° al-tawassu°iyya*, 26-8. His summary on al-Idrīsī's youth draws on both al-°Aqīlī and other writers, some of them obscure European texts which I have not had access to, for instance Wolfgang von Weisel (?), *Bayna al-Shayṭān wa al-Bahr al-Aḥmar/Zwischen Shaytan und Rotes Meer*, Leipzig 1928.

<sup>4</sup> '°alā aḥsan al-aḥwāl'; al-°Aqīlī, *ibid.*, 626.

<sup>5</sup> Al-°Aqīlī, *ibid.*, 626. The Bāṣuhī family was a wellknown, wealthy merchant family in Ṣabyā of Ḥaḍramī origin; Cornwallis, *Asir before World War I*, 98.

<sup>6</sup> Al-°Aqīlī, *ibid.*, 626. It is not known whether this man was a relative of the al-Ḥasan b. °Ākish who stayed with Ibn Idrīs during his final years in °Asīr. See above, Chapter Three.

were well informed of the state of affairs in the Tihāma, and that they also knew of the spiritual influence of the Adārīsa. This may mean that al-Idrīsī travelled to Maṣawwa<sup>c</sup> at the invitation of the Italians, but we cannot be certain of this. However, this is probably where he established his first contacts with the Italians.<sup>7</sup>

After a brief stay in Maṣawwa<sup>c</sup> he travelled to the Ḥijāz where he performed the *ḥajj*, and from there set out for Egypt in 1313/1895-6 in the quest for knowledge. Al-Idrīsī was then around twenty years of age.

### *Studies at al-Azhar and encounters in Cairo*

Muḥammad al-Idrīsī was a student at the al-Azhar university in Cairo for a number of years, but we do not know the exact duration of his stay. Neither do we know the names of his teachers nor the curriculum he studied. Al-<sup>c</sup>Aqīlī only reports that he learnt the classic Islamic disciplines, such as *fiqh*, *ḥadīth*, *tafsīr* etc., and that he excelled in learning and intelligence.<sup>8</sup>

At the time of al-Idrīsī's stay at al-Azhar, the institution had recently undergone the first of a series of changes, which was to lead to the full reform of the university in the twentieth century. These early reforms reflected a series of recent changes in the Egyptian society and were for a large part instigated by Muḥammad <sup>c</sup>Abduh.

The educated classes of Egyptian society had, since the first reforms were instigated by Muḥammad <sup>c</sup>Alī, gradually developed into two distinct groups; those with traditional education and those with a more modern, professional education. The modernization schemes undertaken by Muḥammad <sup>c</sup>Alī had led to the need for modern educated engineers, public officials etc., and these were for a large part educated in the West, or in Westernized schools in Egypt—often run and taught by Europeans. Thus, by the time of Khedive Ismā<sup>c</sup>īl in the 1870s, the division between traditional and modern had grown quite clear. This was also the time when national sentiment started to become articulate in Egypt, and national opposition against the Khedive which

7 Al-<sup>c</sup>Aqīlī, *ibid.*, 628.

8 *Ibid.*, 626.

came to an end by the British invasion in 1882.<sup>9</sup> These factors brought thinkers like Muḥammad ʿAbduh to look for a new way to reconcile Islam to modern society without rejecting Islam as the fundamental cultural and spiritual basis. In this search, ʿAbduh arrived at the solution that to attain an inner revival of the *umma*, one needed also to reform the system of religious education, to reconcile modern training with the understanding of Islam as the guiding principle for change and development. As ʿAbduh reached a position of authority, he was able to carry some of his ideas into practice, also at al-Azhar.

The teaching at al-Azhar in the classical period was rooted in the traditional division between *ʿulūm ṭabīʿiyya* and *ʿulūm naqliyya*, reflecting the division between religious and non-religious education.<sup>10</sup> The preferred method was learning by heart, followed by commentary and questions.

When a student was proficient in one subject, he would obtain an *ijāza* from his teacher. For the student, an *ijāza* meant that he was permitted to teach the subject to others. As a consequence of this system, there was no clear division between master and student; one person could have his *ijāza* and thus be qualified in one subject while still being a student in another.

In Ottoman times, the teaching system at al-Azhar became more rigid and most tendencies towards independent reasoning disappeared. The institution was preoccupied with preserving itself and its doctrines.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup> In 1882, the opposition leader ʿUrābī Pasha had become Minister of War and practically ran the country. He was perceived by the British as a threat to their investments in Egypt, and in September 1882, Britain invaded Egypt. On British rule in Egypt, see Mansfield, *History of the Middle East*, 85-113.

<sup>10</sup> The former concept refers to knowledge gained by sensory observation, and has also been called *falsafīyya*. Under this group fell teaching of such subjects as geometry, astronomy, logic and arithmetic. The latter, *ʿulūm naqliyya*, refers to knowledge based on revelation and therefore subject to special transmission. This included the teaching of the Koran, *ḥadīth*, *fiqh* and *taṣawwuf* (Sufism), as well as linguistic disciplines related to the holy scriptures. See summary by Yasien Mohamed, 'Al-Azhar and the Reforms of Muḥammad Abdu', *Islamic University*, i, 1, 1994, 32-3.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

The first reform decree was imposed on al-Azhar in 1872, aiming at a more coherent administration of the teaching there.<sup>12</sup> An examination system was instituted, where students had to be registered, and they were awarded a diploma at the end of a fixed course of study. This reform was purely administrative and did not affect the curriculum at al-Azhar.

In 1895 new reforms were instigated by the Khedive ʿAbbās II, at the instigation of Muḥammad ʿAbduḥ.<sup>13</sup> An administrative council was established for the university, consisting of five members; three from the al-Azhar ʿulamāʾ and two appointed by the government, one of whom was Muḥammad ʿAbduḥ.

The next reform decree came in 1896, inspired by ʿAbduḥ's views concerning Islamic education in the light of modernisation. These reforms were also administrative, but this time new subjects were introduced. Modern arithmetic and algebra became obligatory subjects, while geography and the history of Islam were introduced as optional subjects. Contrary to what had been ʿAbduḥ's intention, the Islamic sciences themselves were not changed at this time, mostly due to opposition from the conservative scholars. In the period 1895-99 (which coincides with the time when Muḥammad al-Idrīsī most likely was a student in Cairo) the *shaykh al-Azhar* cooperated with ʿAbduḥ in the attempt at reform. The next shaykh was less cooperative, and in 1905 ʿAbduḥ was finally ousted from his position.<sup>14</sup> He died shortly thereafter.

The reformist activities taking place at al-Azhar met with a great deal of opposition from conservative scholars. The Azharīs, the highest class of Egyptian ʿulamāʾ had already lost much socio-economic prestige since the new education system was introduced under Muḥammad ʿAlī. As a consequence of their loss of monopoly over learning, they tended to take a defensive stance against modernization, which they perceived as a further threat to their position.<sup>15</sup>

12 *Ibid.*, 34.

13 *Ibid.*, 43 and Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age*, Oxford 1970, 135.

14 Mohamed, 'Al-Azhar and the reforms', 44.

15 Mohamed, 'Al-Azhar and the reforms', 45. Mohamed also cites the



From the above, we understand that Muḥammad al-Idrīsī at al-Azhar encountered an environment that was in the process, however unwillingly, of facing the full impact of modernity. It is difficult to establish exactly how much impact the ongoing process had on him, since we do not know the names of his teachers there, let alone their views on educational reform.<sup>16</sup> From the sources available to us, we do not know which circles al-Idrīsī associated with at al-Azhar, thus it is difficult to say anything definite about how his stay influenced his later career. However, from the information given by al-ʿAqīlī that al-Idrīsī received a traditional Islamic education, it may be possible to assume that his links were more in the direction of the conservative segment than the reformist groups.

Nevertheless, it may be fair to assume that the environs of al-Azhar was marked by the understanding that reform, somehow and sometime, was unavoidable. The attempted reforms must have been known and discussed by the Azhar milieu, al-Idrīsī included.

Muḥammad al-Idrīsī stayed in Cairo at a time when the city was crowded with diplomats, traders, and military personnel from Europe. Most were British, due to the British administration of Egypt, but also other European powers had their embassies and their various representatives stationed in Cairo. The 'scramble for Africa' was in a large part over, but the imperialist manoeuvring that was to lead up to the First World

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conservatism which had contributed to the rigidity of the university as a reason for the scholarly opposition to reform. Eventually, reform came through at Al-Azhar in the course of the first decades of the twentieth century. In the end, modern society demanded qualifications which the Azharis did not have, such as modern legal or pedagogical training. Mohamed gives this as one of the most powerful incentives for the reform which eventually came.

- 16 Al-ʿAqīlī gives a summary of al-Idrīsī's education: 'He received his certificates (*ijāzāt lahu*) from the outstanding shaykhs of the Maghrebi 'ulamā', and from the [shaykhs at] the University of al-Azhar from the lands of Egypt, and in addition some Yemenī 'ulamā'; *Ta'rīkh al-Mikhhlāf al-Sulaymānī*, II, 626. Al-Nu'āmī writes: 'He got his *ijāza* from the scholars of his time ('ulamā' *waqtihi*) at al-Azhar and from other lands (*wa-ghayruhu min al-buldān*)'; *Ta'rīkh Asīr*, 222.

War had just begun.

There is some evidence that Muḥammad al-Idrīsī moved in these circles during his stay in Cairo. He is specifically reported to have been in contact with the Italian legation there. From Arabic sources, the earliest mention we find of such contact is the account by Sharaf al-Dīn al-Barakātī: 'In the same period [during his stay at al-Azhar] he was contacted by a group (*lafif*) of corrupted people (*mufāsīdūn*) working with the Italian diplomacy. They were followers (*muntasibūn*) of the *ṭarīqa* of his ancestor, *sayyid* Aḥmad.'<sup>17</sup> Al-ʿAqīlī writes that his contact with the Italian legation was through the interpreter, a man named Muḥammad ʿAlī ʿAlawī.<sup>18</sup> Al-Idrīsī apparently knew this interpreter from before, probably through the network of Sanūsī-Idrīsī relations.

Italy viewed the Tihāma with great interest as an outlet for her trade from her colony in Eritrea and as a possible direction of expansion.<sup>19</sup> Since the Tihāma was formally under Ottoman

- 17 Sharaf al-Dīn al-Muḥsin al-Barakātī, *al-Rihla al-Yamaniyya*, Cairo 1912; here used 2nd edn, Beirut 1964, 6. See also al-Shahhārī, *al-Muḥāmiʿ al-tawassuʿiyya*, 28, 'He was in contact with diplomatic circles (*bi-awsāṭ dīblūmāsiyya*) and that helped him in gaining political insight (*naẓr siyāsī*)'.
- 18 Al-ʿAqīlī, *Taʾrīkh al-Mikhlaḥ al-Sulaymānī*, tt, 627. See also Ibn Muṣfir, *al-Sirāj al-munīr*, 110. The interpreter Muḥammad ʿAlī ʿAlawī is mentioned by Vikør, *Sufī and Scholar*, 13. Apparently, this man was one of the main informants of the Italian Enrico Insabato, a lawyer and businessman who wrote on the Sanūsīyya and attempted to establish contact with the Sanūsī. Muḥammad ʿAlī al-ʿAlawī seems to have presented himself as head of the Sanūsīyya in Egypt, although it is unlikely that this was the case. All in all ʿAlawī seems to have been a somewhat opportunistic figure. It is unclear if it was him al-Barakātī referred to as 'corrupted people' (see above), but it is not unlikely. If so, he is said by Barakātī to be a member of the Aḥmadiyya, which might also mean that he was, as he himself stated, a member of the Sanūsīyya. It is also possible that he in fact was initiated into the Ṭarīqa Muḥammadiyya Aḥmadiyya Idrīsīyya.
- 19 On Italian ambitions in Arabia, see Baldry, 'Anglo-Italian rivalry', 156-93. See also Macro, *Yemen and the Western world*, 62-7. Italian traders had visited the Yemen from the base at Maṣawwaʿ in the last decades of the nineteenth century. Towards the end of the century, Italy took to sending naval vessels to the Yemeni ports to demand

suzerainty, Italy was eager to recruit allies in the area, who were against Turkish rule. Al-Barakātī indicates that it was the 'Italian contact' which instilled in al-Idrīsī a feeling of hostility towards the Ottomans.<sup>20</sup> Al-Shahhārī, on the other hand, writes that al-Idrīsī's contact with the Italians in Cairo only served to nurture dreams that he already had.<sup>21</sup>

There is also some evidence for al-Idrīsī having contact with British personnel in Cairo. Al-Shahhārī refers to an article in *al-Ahrām*,<sup>22</sup> which states that al-Idrīsī had contact with British officials who also were eager to secure contacts and goodwill among Arab leaders, especially in the regions close by their colony Aden. A note by Stuhlmann<sup>23</sup> supports the assumption that al-Idrīsī was in contact with British representatives and indicates that his contacts in Cairo may have come about through the Khatmiyya and Idrīsiyya's relatively positive attitude towards the British in Egypt and the Sudan.<sup>24</sup>

We have very few references to al-Idrīsī's contacts or meetings with the Italians or with the British. Nevertheless, it seems well substantiated that such contact took place. None of the few references we have indicate that any agreements or treaties were concluded. It should be kept in mind that al-Idrīsī at this time was a man in his early twenties, a member of the Idrīsī family in the troubled region of 'Asīr and that his status would be more related to his religious prestige than to leadership at a political level. Nevertheless, his contact with diplomatic circles in Cairo

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compensation from the Turks for goods seized by pirates. Italian activities on the eastern Red Sea shore were seen by the British at Aden as an attempt to undermine Turkish authority in the region.

<sup>20</sup> Al-Barakātī, *al-Rihla al-Yamaniyya*, 6.

<sup>21</sup> Al-Shahhārī, *al-Muṭāmi' al-tawassu'iyya*, 28.

<sup>22</sup> Al-Shahhārī gives the reference to this article, *al-Ahrām*, 8.2.1910, no. 9819; *al-Muṭāmi' al-tawassu'iyya*, 28.

<sup>23</sup> Stuhlmann, *Kampf um Arabien*, 88.

<sup>24</sup> On the spread of the Khatmiyya in the Sudan, see Karrār, *Sufi Brotherhoods*, 73-102. British forces completed their occupation of the Sudan in 1898, ending the seventeen-year long period known as the Mahdiyya. The British then set up Anglo-Egyptian rule in the Sudan, for a period lasting until 1956 known as the Condominium. See P.M. Holt, *A Modern History of the Sudan*, London 1967, 77-161.

certainly had political overtones.

While in Cairo Muḥammad al-Idrīsī met Sufi circles related to the Idrīsī tradition. Of this we know very little, yet there exists a few references which may point out the direction for later research.

The Albanian Sufi and poet *al-ḥājj* ‘Umar Luṭfī al-Bashārīzī came to Cairo in 1901 and stayed there for four years. His stay in Egypt consolidated his link to Sufism and drew him particularly to the teachings of Ibn Idrīs. When he returned to his native Kossovo in 1905, he brought with him notes and journals from his time in Egypt.<sup>25</sup> Among these notes are also accounts of his personal relations with Muḥammad al-Idrīsī.<sup>26</sup> At the present we can only assume that these documents may provide us with more information about Muḥammad al-Idrīsī’s Sufi contacts in Egypt.

The ‘Albanian link’ is further strengthened by a note by Rashīd Riḍā in *al-Manār* in 1913. Commenting on a letter from al-Idrīsī to Imam Yaḥyā he gives the following information on the Ottoman mediator Shaykh Tawfīq al-Arnāwuṭī: ‘He is the Shaykh Muḥammad Tawfīq al-Arnāwuṭī of the Turkish ‘*ulamā*’. He stayed at al-Azhar and knew Sayyid Idrīsī there.’<sup>27</sup> Al-Arnāwuṭī (meaning ‘the Albanian’) was a shaykh of the Istanbul branch of the Aḥmadiyya,<sup>28</sup> and thus it is possible that the Albanian interest in the Idrīsī heritage may have circled around this man, in addition to Muḥammad al-Idrīsī himself.

25 These notes are in Arabic and are presently in the University of Pristina in Skopje. For a review of these documents, see Muḥammad Mawfākū and Ni‘ma Allāh Ḥāfiẓ, ‘Al-Ḥājj ‘Umar Luṭfī Al-Bashārīzī’, *Al-‘Arabī*, 2 January 1979, 138.

26 We do not know if ‘Umar Luṭfī met al-Idrīsī at al-Azhar or on journeys in Upper Egypt and the Sudan, as the question of dating is difficult. We know that ‘Umar Luṭfī travelled in the Sudan as well as in the Hijāz and the Yemen, but presently the dates of his travels are unknown; see H.T. Norris, *Islam in the Balkans*, London 1993, 229.

27 Rashīd Riḍā (ed.), *al-Manār*, 16 [1913], 301.

28 Al-‘Aqīlī, *Ta’rīkh al-Mikhlāf al-Sulaymānī*, II, 664, states that al-Arnāwuṭī was a shaykh of the Ṭarīqa Aḥmadiyya in Istanbul. Al-Barakātī, *al-Riḥla al-Yamaniyya*, 6, refers to al-Arnāwuṭī as ‘one of the men of the Ṭarīqa Idrīsīyya’. This probably means that al-Arnāwuṭī was initiated into the Ṭarīqa Aḥmadiyya Idrīsīyya in Istanbul.

While in Cairo, Muḥammad al-Idrīsī gathered material to write a history on his great-grandfather. He also copied and commented on some of Ibn Idrīs' writings.<sup>29</sup> Al-Idrīsī clearly took an interest in the Sufī tradition derived from his ancestor.

One final point needs to be brought up regarding the group which has later been described as 'the fathers' of Arab nationalism. It is certain that Muḥammad al-Idrīsī stayed at al-Azhar at the same time as important figures like Muḥammad ʿAbduh and Rashīd Riḍā.<sup>30</sup> The group around these men debated the question of Islam's backwardness and weakness, and sought for answers. The impact of the West had created in Muslim lands a feeling of inferiority. Intellectuals were eager to develop ideas which could heal this injured feeling. The idea was that the Christian West had borrowed from Islam the essentials for prosperity while the Muslims themselves had deviated from the original Islam which had produced their past glory. This glory could be recreated by returning to pristine Islam. So far the line of thought corresponds to that of the reformists in the early nineteenth century. But intellectuals like Rashīd Riḍā went one step further and claimed that the pure Islam of the ancestors could only be revived through the Arabs, for the basic reason that the ancestors themselves were Arabs. Thus the way to revive Islam was through a revival of Arab culture—Arabism and Arab supremacy within Islam. It should be noted that Riḍā did not reject the Ottoman sultan-caliph, whom he believed to be the most suitable leader of Islam.<sup>31</sup> Others, however, went further and called for

<sup>29</sup> Al-Idrīsī's work on his great-grandfather was completed in Cairo in 1903. It was later incorporated as the first 27 pages of *al-Muntaqā al-naṣīṣ fī manāqib ... al-sayyid Aḥmad ibn Idrīs*, ed. Šāliḥ al-Jaʿfarī, Cairo 1380/1960; see O'Fahey, *Enigmatic Saint*, 123. The collection of commentaries compiled by al-Idrīsī on the writings of Ibn Idrīs is known as *Risālat Awrād al-Idrīsīyya*; see O'Fahey *et alii*, *Arabic Literature of Africa*, 1. *The Writings of Eastern Sudanic Africa to c.1900*, Leiden 1994, 141. See also Appendix C.

<sup>30</sup> On the relation between ʿAbduh and Riḍā, and the writings and ideas of Riḍā and his contemporaries, see Hourani, *Arabic thought*, 161-92, 222-44 and Sylvia G. Haim, *Arab Nationalism: An Anthology*, Berkeley 1976, 19-30, 75-81.

<sup>31</sup> Haim, *ibid.*, 23-4. Only after the revolution of the Young Turks and their deposition of the sultan did Rashīd Riḍā feel able to support

an Arab caliph to be based in Mecca. Many of these thoughts were expressed in Rashīd Riḍā's periodical *al-Manār* which was banned in Ottoman lands (but legal in Egypt under British rule).

In this journal appeared for instance in 1901-02 an article by ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Kawākibī entitled 'Umm al-qurā'.<sup>32</sup> This article is one of many which praise the virtues and purity of the Peninsula Arabs and al-Kawākibī advocates Arab supremacy on the grounds that Arabs were better, less adulterated Muslims.

How much was al-Idrīsī influenced by this line of thought? We do not know of any *direct* contact between al-Idrīsī and the group around Riḍā or al-Kawākibī. Nevertheless, the views of the early nationalists (if we can call them so) were published and discussed in the Cairo intellectual milieu and it is likely that al-Idrīsī picked up ideas which were tailor-made for his later struggle against the Ottoman overlords in ʿAsīr. Ideas such as those of ʿAbduh and Riḍā were, as Hourani writes, 'in the air' in Egypt at the turn of the century.<sup>33</sup> This should be kept in mind when we later discuss the ideological foundations of the Idrīsī state in ʿAsīr.

### *Travels*

From Cairo al-Idrīsī travelled to the Kufra oasis in the south of present-day Libya, then the headquarters of the Sanūsiyya. The date and year he left Cairo is unknown.

As stated in the previous chapter, al-Sanūsī, upon his death in 1859, was succeeded by his son Sayyid Muḥammad al-Mahdi, who was then sixteen years old. Al-Mahdi remained head of the Sanūsiyya until his death in 1902,<sup>34</sup> and during this period the order reached its zenith in terms of influence and expansion, spreading southwards into the Sahara. The brethren collected tithes, secured market-places on the caravan routes, provided facilities for traders, built schools and mosques and provided

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Arab nationalism wholeheartedly.

32 *Al-Manār*, 1901-02. A partial translation is given by Haim, *Arab Nationalism*, 78. On al-Kawākibī, see also Hourani, *Arabic Thought*, 271-3.

33 Hourani, *ibid.*, 222.

34 Evans-Pritchard, *Sanusi*, 20, and Ziadeh, *Sanūsīyah*, 51.

religious and spiritual counsel.

In 1895 Sayyid Muḥammad al-Mahdī decided to transfer the order's centre of activity from Jaghbūb to Kufra, deep in the Sahara desert, where he established a new Sanūsīyya capital.<sup>35</sup> In 1899, al-Mahdī left Kufra for Qirū in Chad. From there he led the order until his death in 1902. He was succeeded by his nephew Sayyid Aḥmad al-Sharīf.

It was to Kufra Muḥammad al-Idrīsī came, probably some-time around the turn of the century 1899/1900. We can assume with reasonable certainty that Muḥammad al-Idrīsī arrived in Cairo in 1313/1895-6.<sup>36</sup> We are told that he stayed at al-Azhar for 'a long time' (*mudda ṭawīla*),<sup>37</sup> which should at least indicate a period of four or five years. The new regulations at al-Azhar, implemented by ʿAbduh in 1896, meant that a diploma could be obtained after a minimum of eight years study. This would give a date for al-Idrīsī's departure from Cairo of 1321/1903. However, given the later chronology and other sources, it seems that he may have left somewhat earlier. Al-Shahhārī writes that he 'went to Kufra ... to deepen his knowledge at the hand of al-Sanūsī' (*ʿalā yad al-Sanūsī*).<sup>38</sup> This could indicate that al-Idrīsī met with Muḥammad al-Mahdī who, as we have seen, left for Qirū in 1899. In accordance with this, O'Fahey states that al-Idrīsī spent one year with the Sanūsīyya in 1899,<sup>39</sup> which

<sup>35</sup> It has been commented that the reasons for this move are most likely to be found in the increasing Ottoman and European interest in the interior of Libya. Muḥammad al-Mahdī preferred to preserve the order at a place remote from the intrigues and tactics of great-power politics. The British occupation of Egypt in 1882 also had made Jaghbūb vulnerable to foreign interference, and Kufra, a less accessible place, was considered more easily defensible. It is also possible that al-Mahdī wanted to move his headquarters closer to the Sudan, where he had close contacts with the other Idrīsī-derived orders; see Evans-Pritchard, *Sanusi*, 21 and Ziadeh, *Sanūsīyah*, 58-9.

<sup>36</sup> The year 1313 is given for his arrival in Cairo by al-ʿAqīlī, *Taʾrīkh al-Mikhḷāf al-Sulaymānī*, II, 628, and al-Shahhārī, *al-Muṭāmiʿ al-tawassuʿīyya*, 26. The same year is given by Ibn Musfir, *al-Sirāj*, 110.

<sup>37</sup> Al-ʿAqīlī, *Taʾrīkh al-Mikhḷāf al-Sulaymānī*, II, 626.

<sup>38</sup> Al-Shahhārī, *al-Muṭāmiʿ al-tawassuʿīyya*, 28.

<sup>39</sup> O'Fahey, *Enigmatic Saint*, 122, based on *Arabian Personalities of*

would mean that he only stayed 3-4 years at al-Azhar before embarking on his travels. In contrast, al-Barakātī explicitly states that Muḥammad al-Idrīsī stayed at al-Azhar for six years, which would mean until 1901-02.<sup>40</sup> Since a comparison of the sources does not provide any clear answers, we can only conclude that al-Idrīsī embarked on his journey sometime between 1899 and 1902.

Regardless of the time of his visit, al-Idrīsī encountered in Kufra the highly organized structure of the Sanūsiyya order and saw how the essentially religious structure functioned as community-organizing factor in the area. We do not know whether al-Idrīsī met with Aḥmad al-Sharīf, who reportedly accompanied Muḥammad al-Mahdī to Qirū in 1899 and was proclaimed successor there.<sup>41</sup>

After his stay in Kufra, Muḥammad al-Idrīsī travelled to Dongola in the Sudan and stayed with the Adārisa there. In Dongola he met with his father's cousin Muḥammad al-Sharīf b. ʿAbd al-ʿĀl, who had settled there after Anglo-Egyptian rule (the Condominium) was established in 1898 and had resumed his missionary activity. During his time in Dongola, Muḥammad al-Idrīsī married 'a daughter of Shaykh Hārūn Ṭawīl of the Aḥmadiyya *ṭarīqa*'.<sup>42</sup> She gave birth to his first son, ʿAlī. He is also reported to have married a daughter of Muṣṭafā ʿArakī of Dongola.<sup>43</sup>

While in the Sudan, al-Idrīsī also associated with the religious scholars of that country, including shaykhs from other orders. A substantial collection of papers recently acquired by the National Records Office (NRO) in Khartoum provides information on the friendship between al-Idrīsī and the Sudanese Tijānī shaykh, Muddaththir Ibrāhīm al-Ḥajjāz.<sup>44</sup> It seems that while

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*the Early Twentieth Century*, Cambridge 1917, 1986 and al-Barakātī, *al-Riḥla al-Yamaniyya*, 3-4.

40 Al-Barakātī, *al-Riḥla al-Yamaniyya*, 5.

41 Ziadeh, *Sanūsiyyah*, 66.

42 Al-Shahhārī, *al-Muṭāmiʿ al-tawassuʿiyya*, 28.

43 O'Fahey, *Enigmatic Saint*, 122, based on *Arabian Personalities*, 25. There is no further identification.

44 ʿAlī Šāliḥ Karrār and Yahyā Muḥammad Ibrāhīm, 'A Sudanese Tijānī shaykh: Muddaththir Ibrāhīm al-Ḥajjāz', forthcoming. Al-Ḥajjāz was



visiting his family in the Sudan, al-Idrīsī also met al-Ḥajjāz. However, we do not know if al-Idrīsī had more extensive contacts with the Tijāniyya or other Sufi orders in the Sudan.

Although not explicitly stated in any of the available sources, it is probable that al-Idrīsī, on his journey to or from Dongola, visited the Idrīsī centre at al-Zayniyya in Upper Egypt. There he must have met his fathers cousins, who later joined him in 'Asīr, Sayyid Muḥammad al-Sanūsī, Muḥammad al-'Arabī and Muṣṭafā Aḥmad b. Idrīs.<sup>45</sup>

After his education and his travels, Muḥammad al-Idrīsī returned to 'Asīr. He went by ship to al-Ḥudayda where he stayed for a while before returning to Ṣabyā. It is difficult to say exactly when al-Idrīsī returned to 'Asīr. The sources give conflicting dates; yet all confirm that he returned before his father's death on 2 February 1907. Al-Shahhārī writes that he returned to 'Asīr in 1907.<sup>46</sup> Both al-'Aqīlī and al-Nu'cīmī state that al-Idrīsī returned to his native land after a journey which lasted eleven years.<sup>47</sup> This would bring us to the year 1324, which means sometime between February 1906 and February 1907. Stuhlmann state that al-Idrīsī returned to Ṣabyā in 1907.<sup>48</sup> On the other hand, Bury states that al-Idrīsī returned to Ṣabyā in 1903.<sup>49</sup> This, however, does not fit with neither the earlier nor

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born in the Sudan in 1866-7. He joined the Mahdi in 1882 after a six-month stay in Medina and was appointed secretary to the Mahdi; later he was secretary to the Mahdi's successor. He was initiated into the Tijāniyya by the order's main missionary to the Sudan; Muḥammad b. Mukhār al-Shinqīṭī, known as Wad al-'Āliyya. After the establishment of the Condominium, the Omdurman Tijāniyya, of which al-Ḥajjāz was a member, declared themselves in favour of the new regime. In 1911, al-Ḥajjāz was appointed head of the Omdurman Tijāniyya.

These are sons of 'Abd al-'Āl who stayed on at al-Zayniyya when 'Abd al-'Āl set out for the Sudan (intending to go to 'Asīr) together with his eldest son Muḥammad al-Sharīf. See also Karrār, *Sufi brotherhoods*, 117, and the family chart in Appendix A.

Al-Shahhārī, *al-Muṭāmi' al-tawassu'īyya*, 29.

Al-'Aqīlī, *Ta'rīkh al-Mikhlaḥ al-Sulaymānī*, II, 629, and al-Nu'cīmī, *Ta'rīkh 'Asīr*, 222.

Stuhlmann, *Kampf um Arabien*, 87.

Bury, *Arabia Infelix*, 22.

the later chronology.

The most likely year of his return must thus be 1324/1906 - 07. Muḥammad al-Idrīsī was then 30 or 31 years of age.

*Muḥammad al-Idrīsī in Ṣabyā—  
the founding of the Idrīsī state, 1907-1909*

As we have seen (Chapter Two), °Asīr was in a turbulent state in the early years of the twentieth century. Tribal unrest was widespread. The *wālī* of the Vilayet al-Yaman, Maḥmūd Nadīm Bey, had temporarily managed to crush the rebellion through harsh military action. The Ottomans had their hands full suppressing the ongoing rebellion led by the Imam Yaḥyā who had become imam after his father in 1904.

When discussing conditions in °Asīr, it is necessary to make a distinction between the population in the larger coastal cities and the inhabitants of the inner Tihāma and the mountains, °Asīr al-Sarāh. In the coastal cities (the most important of which was al-Ḥudayda), the merchant class constituted the most influential group. In addition, there existed a large class of craftsmen, such as spinners and weavers engaged in the production of cotton.<sup>50</sup> The ports were, by their very nature, cosmopolitan, where many groups lived and conducted their professions. Indian, Persian and Ethiopian traders, as well as a numerous group of Ḥaḍramīs, worked alongside the local population. Goods were brought from the interior to the markets, for the most part by nomadic tribesmen. The main exports from the ports were coffee, hides and cotton. Sailors, both African and European, crowded the ports and African slaves and slave-traders were an ever-present part of the local picture. The ports also held Ottoman garrisons.

In this environment, anti-Ottoman sentiment was muted. The merchant class for the most part adhered to the Shāfi'ī school of law, but there were some who followed the Ḥanafī school which

50 For what follows, see Rihani, *Around the Coasts*, 123-48; Cornwallis, °Asīr before World War I, 11-21, and Bury, *Arabia Infelix*, 20-40. See also A. Hofheinz, 'A Yemeni Library in Eritrea. Arabic Manuscripts in the Italian Foreign Ministry', *Der Islam*, lxxii, 1, 1995, 98-136.

law, but there were some who followed the Ḥanafī school which had spread to the region following Ottoman influence.<sup>51</sup> For many of the merchant class, Ottoman administration was seen as the most beneficial to promote orderly conditions, which again would enhance commercial activity. The religious differences between the merchants and the Ottomans were less crucial—or they were toned down for the sake of trade.

The towns and villages of the Tihāma interior was a different sort of environment and the ʿAsīrī mountains even more so. Few, if any, outsiders penetrated the inhospitable Tihāma and contact with the outside was limited to bringing goods to the markets on the coast. The basis of society was tribal, in the towns and villages as well as outside. Each tribe consisted of several subdivisions, or clans, where each controlled territories within loosely- defined boundaries. Tihāma dwellers were mainly adherents of the Shāfiʿī school, but among the mountain tribes there was also influences from the Ḥanbalī School, stemming from the Wahhābī expansion in the nineteenth century.<sup>52</sup>

Ṣabyā lies in the central Tihāma, approximately thirty kilometres inland from the port-city of Jizān (also written Jayzān and laẓān) and some thirty kilometres north of Abū ʿArīsh. In the early twentieth century, the town consisted of huts built from straw and a larger palace-building of mud in addition to a fine mosque. In 1915, the town had approximately 10,000 inhabitants.<sup>53</sup> The central Tihāma was the most densely populated part of the Tihāma, due to the fertile *wādīs* that traversed the area.<sup>54</sup> In this region, each village constituted a separate entity and feuds and violence was commonplace between the settlements. The Ottoman rulers had made little or no attempt to impose order, with the result being that the area was so unruly that only large armies could travel safely. The population consisted of Sayyids and *ashrāf* in addition to the *ahl* (people), who were largely of Sudanese descent—freed slaves whose ancestors had been

<sup>51</sup> See Cornwallis, *ʿAsīr before World War I*, 12, and Hofheinz 'A Yemeni Library'.

<sup>52</sup> Cornwallis, *ibid.*, 12.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>54</sup> On the population of the central Tihāma, see *ibid.*, 40-3.

brought over from Maṣawwa<sup>c</sup>, but also people who were still enslaved. The chief tribal unit in the area was the Ja<sup>c</sup>āfira, who cultivated the land in the *wādīs* around Ṣabyā. Al-<sup>c</sup>Aqīlī<sup>55</sup> gives a detailed description of the state of affairs in the Tihāma and lists the various lines of division among the people.

By the time of his father's death in 1907, Muḥammad al-Idrīsī had already embarked on 'his mission of religious reform prompted by long years of Turkish despotism and misrule'.<sup>56</sup> Al-Shahhārī writes that al-Idrīsī started preaching already at al-Ḥudayda, before he returned to Ṣabyā.<sup>57</sup> After returning to his home town he began preaching there, and the people gathered in large numbers to hear him. Al-<sup>c</sup>Aqīlī writes that al-Idrīsī would call the people to God and attract as many as four to five thousand people every day. They would come to learn and to pray with him while he would 'sit with them, saying *dhikrs* and teaching them matters of religion'.<sup>58</sup>

### *Muḥammad al-Idrīsī as arbitrator*

As described earlier, the central Tihāma was in a state of anarchy. Into this context Muḥammad al-Idrīsī introduced the concepts of law and order based on Islam, summoning the people to the religion. In his proclamation, the *Bayān* of 1912, al-Idrīsī gives a description of the state of affairs in <sup>c</sup>Asīr upon his arrival: '[There was] a general breakdown of public security in all districts because of the demands for revenge, and the government left the people with a free rein. This was the matter which brought a halt to all work and activity, both in trade, agriculture and other domains, to such an extent that a man was unable to

55 Al-<sup>c</sup>Aqīlī, *Ta'rikh al-Mikhlāf al-Sulaymānī*, II, 633.

56 Baldry, 'The Turkish-Italian War', 54.

57 Al-Shahhārī, *al-Muṭāmi' al-tawassu'iyya*, 29. Al-Shahhārī adds that the Turkish officials were suspicious of al-Idrīsī's preaching, because of his connections with the Italians who were pressing to obtain influence in <sup>c</sup>Asīr. The Italians had opened a consular office in al-Ḥudayda in 1902; see Baldry, 'Anglo-Italian rivalry', 158.

58 Al-<sup>c</sup>Aqīlī, *Ta'rikh al-Mikhlāf al-Sulaymānī*, II, 626. See also 'Isām Ḍiyā' al-Dīn al-Sayyid, *'Asīr fī 'alaqāt al-siyāsiyya al-Sa'ūdiyya al-Yamaniyya (1919-1934)*, Cairo 1409/1989, 17.

move a foot outside his dwelling unless some of his companions went with him, equipped with arms to fight off assailants (and they were many!).' To emphasize the point, al-Idrīsī further writes: 'If you had seen what went on at that time, you would have seen something discouraging [lit.: to make the liver burst], fit to prevent you from sleeping and to prolong wakefulness'.<sup>59</sup>

This troubled situation in the central Tihāma was then resolved by al-Idrīsī, as he established peace between the feuding tribes. Al-Idrīsī tells how he was granted success in intervening between two great tribes, but he does not specify exactly which tribes they are: 'When the crisis intensified, and God wanted to bring relief, then He made us a way out; He granted me success in intervening between two great tribes to make peace (and peace is good)' and 'This was achieved by abandoning former claims to blood [revenge] and in allowing cases to be tried before the *sharīʿa* instead of before the oppressors [Ottoman court]'.<sup>60</sup>

Which were these two tribes that al-Idrīsī refers to? We are told by al-ʿAqīlī that a feud had been going on between the Jaʿāfira tribe of the central Tihāma and the people of Ṣabyā (*ahl Ṣabyā*) since 1902.<sup>61</sup> There was also continuous outbreaks of *fitna* (war, conflict) between the subclans of the Jaʿāfira. All parties sought revenge for previous murders and the situation had quickly escalated into chaos, as the Turkish officials made no effort to pass judgement or establish order. Stuhlmann, on the other hand, claim that there was an ongoing conflict between the 'Gä'fira und Tamba[?]'.<sup>62</sup> It seems that this statement is erroneous (we have not been able to identify any tribal unit named Tamba), and that al-ʿAqīlī's version is the most reliable in this question.

In the process of establishing peace between the tribal groups, we see that al-Idrīsī takes upon himself a role common to holy men or shaykhs in Muslim societies; that of the mediator

<sup>59</sup> Al-Idrīsī, *Bayān li'l-nās*; see Appendix B.

<sup>60</sup> Al-ʿAqīlī, *Taʾrīkh al-Mikhḷāf al-Sulaymānī*, II, 634. The war between the Jaʿāfira and the Ahl Ṣabyā is stated by al-ʿAqīlī (p. 637), to have started in 1320/1902. The same is repeated by al-Sahhārī, *al-Muḷāmiʿ al-tawassuʿiyya*, 34-35, based, for a large part on al-ʿAqīlī.

<sup>61</sup> Stuhlmann, *Kampf um Arabien*, 87.

in cases of dispute.<sup>62</sup>

Firstly, he functions as an arbitrator between groups which for some reason or another hold a grudge against another. Holding a grudge, or claim, in Yemeni tribal context, means that one group will seek compensation for an injury inflicted by one or more member of another group. In the case of murder, the injured group, kinsmen of the dead, can either seek revenge or accept 'blood-money' (*diya*). A similar system of compensation is maintained also for physical wounds, where the perpetrators are expected to pay 'wound-money' (*arsh*) and for theft. There exists also the notion of compensation for injury to *sharaf*, that is to a tribesman's honour. Under this system, a conflict will traditionally be resolved by an arbitrator, a shaykh, who estimates the amount of blood-money or other compensation due. The sum will normally be calculated on the basis of the *sharīʿa*, but there will also be room for the arbitrator's opinion (*raʾy*) concerning the situation. In ʿAsīr this system of tribal honour was a reality. The Ottoman administrators, however, failed to act as arbitrators in cases of conflict. Instead they left the situation to develop into virtual war between the tribal fractions. The Ottomans also refused to recognize the *sharīʿa* as the basis of law; instead they tried to implement civil code (the *kaniin*) based on a secular basis. This leads us to the second part of al-Idrīsī's activities in ʿAsīr. He saw that to establish peace among the tribal groups, judgements needed to be based on a law acceptable to those involved. In tribal Arabia in the early twentieth century this meant the *sharīʿa*, or at least the ideal of the *sharīʿa* adapted to a tribal situation. Undoubtedly, al-Idrīsī knew of and recognized the possibility of secular law to regulate life and trade in the cosmopolitan centres of Cairo and Istanbul, but he also saw that in a tribal society where the principles of blood-honour were fundamental, the ideal of the *sharīʿa* was the most suited to serve as an acceptable basis for judgement.

62 It seems that Ibn Idrīs took on this function on at least one occasion during his final years in the Yemen, when he was mediating on behalf of another shaykh inland of Zabīd; see O'Fahey, *Enigmatic Saudi* 86-7. On the role of the arbitrator in the Yemeni tribal society, see Dresch, *Tribes, Government and History*, 38-74, 88-106.

*Muḥammad al-Idrīsī proclaims himself imam*

After peace was established between these 'two great tribes', other tribes 'stretched their necks to join this system; their members wanted peace of mind and to leave behind the hardship caused by conflict, quarrel and disunity'. Al-Idrīsī writes further that '... God granted this humble servant success in intervening between a number of tribes and peace was established between them by the blessing of sincere faith. Thus, they succeeded as their brothers had succeeded before them.'<sup>63</sup>

Al-Shahhārī states that on the same day that al-Idrīsī succeeded in establishing peace between the Ja<sup>c</sup>āfira and the Ahl Ṣabyā, there were also people of many other tribes present in the town. Upon learning of al-Idrīsī's success, they too turned to him with their disputes. Apparently, al-Idrīsī succeeded also in establishing peace among these people and his reputation increased further.<sup>64</sup>

After al-Idrīsī had established peace between the people of Ṣabyā and the Ja<sup>c</sup>āfira, as well as surrounding tribes, he apparently proclaimed himself imam. According to al-Shahhārī, this happened on the 24 December 1908.<sup>65</sup> By assuming the title of imam, Muḥammad al-Idrīsī took on responsibility for the surrounding tribes, on a spiritual level, but also as a worldly leader. He thereby implicitly renounced Ottoman rule. Al-Shahhārī writes that by January 1909, a number of tribes had recognized al-Idrīsī as imam; the people of Ṣabyā, the Ḥusaynī tribes (*qabā'il al-Ḥusaynī*), the people of the Mikhlāf al-Shāmī, the Ja<sup>c</sup>āfira and the Ḍamad.<sup>66</sup>

Apparently, al-Idrīsī did not gain tribal allegiance only by peaceful persuasion and successful arbitrating. When a shaykh of the Ḍamad tribe refused to recognize him as imam, al-Idrīsī himself led a military expedition to seek pledges of allegiance.

<sup>63</sup> Idrīsī, *Bayān li'l-nās*, in Appendix B.

<sup>64</sup> Shahhārī, *al-Muṭāmi' al-tawassu'iyya*, 34.

<sup>65</sup> Summary by al-Shahhārī, *ibid.*, 34-5. This summary is, for a large part, based on the detailed account given by al-<sup>c</sup>Aqilī. See also

<sup>66</sup> Allāh Muḥammad Ḥusayn Abū Dāhish, *al-Ḥayāt al-fikriyya*

*al-ḥadīyya fī junūb al-bilād al-Sa'ūdiyya*, Riyad 1982, 19.

<sup>67</sup> Shahhārī, *ibid.*, 35.

According to al-Shahhārī, the shaykh was arrested by his own people and al-Idrīsī returned to Ṣabyā after having been acknowledged as imam by the people.<sup>67</sup>

Another episode which is related by several sources goes to demonstrate al-Idrīsī's determination to gain leadership among the peoples of the Tihāma. It concerns the relationship between Muḥammad al-Idrīsī and Aḥmad al-Sharīf al-Khawājī, a resident of Ṣabyā with Turkish sympathies. Blaming him for the problems in the Tihāma, al-Idrīsī had the man arrested and both his hands cut off. After that, writes al-Shahhārī, the people feared him.<sup>68</sup>

### *Establishing an Idrīsī government*

Al-°Aqīlī<sup>69</sup> states that Muḥammad al-Idrīsī at the end of Dhū 'l-Hijja 1326/January 1909 established his first government (*ḥukūma*) and a court consisting of five *qāḍīs*. The new Idrīsī government consisted of four persons (*wuzarā'*):

### *Muḥammad Yaḥyā Bāṣuhī*

He was of a well-known merchant family in Ṣabyā of Ḥaḍramī origin.<sup>70</sup> Born in 1294/1877, he studied with his relative, Sālim b. °Abd al-Raḥmān al-Bāṣuhī, who was also the teacher of Muḥammad al-Idrīsī. He later started working as a merchant in his family firm and accumulated a considerable wealth. In 1913,

67 *Ibid.*, 35.

68 Al-°Aqīlī, *Ta'rīkh al-Mikhlāf al-Sulaymānī*, II, 657 and al-Shahhārī, *ibid.*, 35. Bury also refers to the episode, and states that Aḥmad al-Sharīf later went to Paris to have artificial hands fitted. As he later passed through Egypt to return to the Yemen, the shipping agent remarked that 'there was something funny about his hands'; *Arabia Infelix*, 163. Al-Idrīsī justifies his action in an appendix to a *Manshūr* dated 11 Jumāda I/31 May 1909. In this document, Aḥmad al-Sharīf is blamed for the *fitna* between the Ahl Ṣabyā and the Ja°āfira, and for 'turning away from the path of God'. The document is reproduced in al-°Aqīlī, pp. 766-8.

69 Al-°Aqīlī, *ibid.*, 645. Al-Shahhārī gives the exact date to be 23 January 1909; *al-Muṭāmi' al-tawassu'īyya*, 35.

70 On the background of Bāṣuhī, see al-°Aqīlī, *ibid.*, 648, and Cornwallis, *Asir before World War I*, 98-9.



Muḥammad al-Idrīsī married his daughter.

*Ḥummūd b. Muḥammad Sirdāb al-Ḥāzimī*

He was of the Khawājī *ashrāf* of Ṣabyā, and a member of the group of leaders from the Ahl Ṣabyā who agreed to resolve their conflicts with the Jaʿāfira by al-Idrīsī's arbitration.<sup>71</sup>

*Yahyā Zirkī Ḥukmī*

Also a member of the group of Ṣabyā leaders who first approached al-Idrīsī as arbitrator.<sup>72</sup>

*Muḥammad Ṭāhir Riḍwān*

One of the chiefs of the Ahl Ṣabyā and member of the group mentioned above.<sup>73</sup>

After the establishment of the Idrīsī government and court, he was joined by several other tribes, including the influential Rijāl al-Māʿ.<sup>74</sup> It is difficult to establish exactly which tribes had joined al-Idrīsī, but what we can say with relative certainty is that his influence had spread as far north as al-Qunfudha and as far south as Maydī in early 1909.<sup>75</sup>

*Allegations against al-Idrīsī*

As al-Idrīsī's influence spread, his movement took on a wider political importance. Even if al-Idrīsī himself may have viewed his own efforts as primarily religious, it was not perceived as

<sup>71</sup> For background, see Cornwallis, *Asir before World War I*, 91 and al-ʿAqīlī, *Taʿrīkh al-Mikhlāf al-Sulaymānī*, II, 641-2.

Al-ʿAqīlī, *ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> Al-ʿAqīlī, *ibid.* and Cornwallis, *Asir before World War I*, 98.

<sup>73</sup> Al-Shahhārī, *al-Muʿāmiʿ al-tawassuʿiyya*, 35. The Rijāl al-Māʿ inhabited the land between Abhā and the sea and were renowned for their internal unity and independency. The Rijāl al-Māʿ consisted of several subdivisions. It seems that they attached themselves to al-Idrīsī as equals rather than as subjects; see Cornwallis, *Asir before World War I*, 59-63.

<sup>74</sup> Baldy, 'The Turkish-Italian war', 54, referring to *Yeni Gazeta*, Istanbul, 6 September 1909.

such by the Ottoman governors in 'Asīr. They quickly recognized the political potential of al-Idrīsī's influence and were especially apprehensive of his activities because of his link to the Italians. Following his success, voices were raised in opposition. These came first and foremost from the Ottomans and their adherents, who attempted to slander al-Idrīsī as a false *mahdī*, a pretender and a charlatan.

According to these accusations, al-Idrīsī had in his possession several gadgets which he used to produce fake miracles to attract the crowds and gain the allegiance of tribal leaders. These allegations are repeated in several of the contemporary European sources. He was accused of having in his repertoire a number of chemical tricks, such as turning water into blood by the means of an aniline dye or changing his appearance by means of make-up or giving himself a magical aura with phosphate. He is also said to have possessed an electrical battery which was used to administer shocks to his followers or turn on a light bulb every time he left or entered a house.<sup>76</sup>

Al-Idrīsī was also accused of using a 'phonograph' to procure miracles.<sup>77</sup> This led to an interesting series of religious writings by a Khatmiyya shaykh in al-Ḥudayda known as

76 Stuhlmann: 'Ausserdem versuchte er mit Hilfe chemischer Kunst, wie Phosphor-schminke, farbigen Tinkturen usw. sich einen magischen Ruf zu geben'; *Kampf um Arabien*, 87. Bury: 'Sheikh Idris had to use a good many stage tricks to hold the allegiance of the ignorant tribesmen on whom his power depends. I might mention his faked miracle of turning water into blood by means of aniline dye, or his startling changes of make-up (probably procured in Egypt) which enable him to appear before his astonished followers as an old man, a youth, a negro, or even (Allah regard us) a woman'; *Arabia Infelix*, 22. Jacobs: 'An electric battery was his special badge of office. Shocks were administered to his credulous followers, and this was a means to enhance his occult reputation!'; *Kings of Arabia*, 125.

77 This allegation is referred to indirectly by Rihani, who refutes the allegation on behalf of al-Idrīsī: 'Like most spiritual heads, however, he was accused of charlatanry; but he did not use the phonograph to frighten the Bedu, nor the electric light to bewilder them'; *Around the Coasts*, 167.

‘Uthmān Fawānīs.<sup>78</sup> In his writings, the gramophone (referred to as *ṣundūq al-nāṭiq*, which can be loosely translated ‘talking box’ or ‘box producing intelligible speech’) is denounced as a work of devilish illusion, on the grounds that the talking of inanimate objects is a disruption of Divine order in nature. The gramophone is equally denounced with reference to Koranic analogies and to Prophetic Traditions. Apparently, the issue was a topic for debate among the ‘*ulamā*’ of al-Ḥudayda, as Fawānīs, in some of his writings, is defending his viewpoint against attacks from others.<sup>79</sup>

The opposition of the al-Ḥudayda ‘*ulamā*’ to al-Idrīsī is here expressed in religious terms, but may perhaps be better understood within a political framework. In al-Ḥudayda, as described above, anti-Turkish sentiments were less strong, and the scholarly class was much more favourable to Turkish interests. It is in this light we must understand the many accusations brought forth against al-Idrīsī; the same allegations which are repeated by our European sources.

Al-Idrīsī himself strongly refuted these allegations of charlatanism and fraud, and in the *Bayān* he also denies the accusation that he intended to proclaim himself as the *mahdī*: ‘We do not propagate anything of the widespread claims which are misinterpreted by the false ideas of the minds of the masses. Thus, we do not claim the *mahdiyya*, as they declare. We do not practice tricks such as they falsely allege. We do not claim illumination or knowledge of the hidden, such as they rumour it’ and, ‘We neither claim caliphate nor kingdom as they mistakenly suspect’.<sup>80</sup>

Evidently, al-Idrīsī projects a picture of himself, not as *maḥdī* or saint, not as divinely guided, but as a just and knowledgeable Islamic ruler, who does what an Islamic ruler is suppo-

<sup>78</sup> This shaykh was ‘Uthmān b. Muḥammad b. Musā b. ‘Umar b. Sūmār Fawānīs. He lived at al-Ḥudayda in the first decades of the twentieth century, teaching Ḥanafī *fiqh*, and was affiliated to the Khatmiyya brotherhood; see Hofheinz, ‘Yemeni Library’.

<sup>79</sup> The writings of Fawānīs are part of the Hofheinz collection in Leiden. The manuscripts concerning the ‘phonograph’ affair are: 1043/4 (e), (f/1), (f/2), (f/3), (f/4), (g), (h) and (i).

<sup>80</sup> Al-Idrīsī, *Bayān li’l-nās*, see Appendix B.

sed to do; bidding to honour and forbidding dishonour—ordaining good and forbidding evil. In this, he represents an alternative to the present, less-than-perfect rulers; the governors of the Ottoman Empire.

*The Idrīsī-Ottoman confrontation: The events of 1909*

In March 1909, the Zarānīq tribe, living around the town of al-Zaydiyya south of Bayt al-Faqīh, rose in rebellion against the Ottomans. The Turks reacted by sending large forces from Ṣanʿāʾ and Maydī to suppress the uprising, but the task proved difficult and the military leaders repeatedly had to request reinforcements.<sup>81</sup>

At the same time, while a large part of Ottoman forces were occupied with the Zarānīq rebellion, Muḥammad al-Idrīsī took his first military steps against the Turks in ʿAsīr. This he did in his capacity as imām, mustering soldiers from the tribes now loyal to his leadership. When the Idrīsī insurrection started, it was under the military command of Muṣṭafā b. ʿAbd al-ʿĀl known as Muṣṭafā Aḥmad b. Idrīs or Sayyid Muṣṭafā, his fathers cousin from al-Zayniyya in Luxor.<sup>82</sup> In the summer of 1909, soldiers loyal to al-Idrīsī assisted an uprising instigated by tribes living east of al-Luḥayya. From there, they occupied Qawānis and al-Zaydiyya and on 23 August they captured al-Luḥayya.<sup>83</sup> After this initial victory, the tribes between al-Qunfudha and Maydī also joined al-Idrīsī. In September 1909, Idrīsī forces captured the town of Muḥāʾil, some thirty kilometres north of

81 Baldry, 'Al-Yaman and the Turkish occupation', 181, based on FO archival sources.

82 Three of the sons of ʿAbd al-ʿĀl had come to ʿAsīr in 1909, following the establishment of the Idrīsī government in January that year, Sayyid Muḥammad al-Sanūsī, Muḥammad al-ʿArabī and Muṣṭafā Aḥmad b. Idrīs (see above on al-Idrīsī's travels); Al-ʿAqīlī, *Taʾrikh al-Mikhlāf al-Sulaymānī*, II, 852. On the role of Muṣṭafā as military leader of the 1909 insurrection, see al-Shahhārī, *al-Muṭāmiʿ al-tawassuʿiyya*, 37.

83 On what follows, see Baldry, 'Al-Yaman and the Turkish occupation', 181-4, and al-Shahhārī, *al-Muṭāmiʿ al-tawassuʿiyya*, 37-38.

Abhā.<sup>84</sup>

The Turks in ʿAsīr were stationed in garrisons; the majority of their military forces, as well as administration, being permanently stationed in Ṣanʿāʾ. There were also large Turkish garrisons in the coastal cities of the Tihāma; in al-Ḥudayda, Maydī, and al-Qunfudha troops were stationed. In the ʿAsīr inland, the Turks had troops in Abhā, the traditional mountain-capital of ʿAsīr, which in reality was the only Turkish stronghold in the interior.

When Idrīsī forces captured Muḥāʾil, they in effect cut Abhā's connection with the sea. At the same time, troops loyal to al-Idrīsī closed in on al-Qunfudha in the north. The Ottoman military leaders in ʿAsīr were unable to carry out Istanbul's order of capturing Ṣabyā, due to their preoccupation with the Zarānīq rebellion further south. Awaiting reinforcements from the Ḥijāz, the Turks concentrated their forces in defence of al-Ḥudayda which seemed threatened by the Idrīsī, and on Jizān, which was still under Turkish control, despite the Idrīsī activity in the immediate hinterland. Turkish attacks against Idrīsī tribesmen were also launched from al-Luḥayya, but they were unable to capture either Ṣabyā or to regain control of Abhā and its connection with the sea.

By October 1909, the Ottomans had regained control of some of the towns in the interior and plans were made for a big advance on the Idrīsī stronghold in Ṣabyā and Abhā. The expected troop reinforcements arrived in ʿAsīr. The commander of these troops was General Ḥasan Saʿīd Pasha.<sup>85</sup>

Establishing himself in Jizān, Saʿīd Pasha sent a delegation to Muḥammad al-Idrīsī, headed by Shaykh Tawfiq al-Arnāwuṭī, to investigate the state of affairs in the Idrīsī camp. This is the same Shaykh Tawfiq with whom al-Idrīsī had been acquainted

<sup>84</sup> Baldry, 'Al-Yaman and the Turkish occupation', 182, and al-Shahhārī, *al-Muṭāmiʿ al-tawassuʿiyya*, 37.

<sup>85</sup> Al-ʿAqīlī, *Taʾrīkh al-Mikhlāf al-Sulaymānī*, II, 664-5 and al-Shahhārī, *al-Muṭāmiʿ al-tawassuʿiyya*, 37. According to al-Shahhārī, Saʿīd Pasha arrived in October 1909. See also Baldry, 'At-Yaman and the Turkish occupation', 184, which cites the 'Morning Post' of 22 October 1909, referring to the agreement at al-Ḥafāʾir.

in Cairo.<sup>86</sup> Sending the prominent Aḥmadiyya shaykh as a negotiator indicates that the Ottomans knew of the Idrīsī 'network' and attempted to use it to gain favour and goodwill with al-Idrīsī. It seems that the net result of the interview was to set up a meeting between Saʿīd Pasha and Muḥammad al-Idrīsī.

Muḥammad al-Idrīsī met Saʿīd Pasha in Jīzān.<sup>87</sup> At the meeting, al-Idrīsī informed the general about his complaints with regard to the corruption of the Ottoman officials and their oppression and misrule. These complaints are repeated by al-Idrīsī in the *Bayān*. According to al-Idrīsī, the Ottoman officials had brought about the rebellions by their own behaviour and he was not to blame for the unrest.

Saʿīd Pasha apparently recognized that al-Idrīsī was the real authority in the Tihāma and therefore attempted to bring about an agreement with him. In the words of al-Idrīsī, the general agreed to 'leave things as they are'.<sup>88</sup> From al-Idrīsī's point of view, this meant that he now got official Ottoman recognition of his actual position, ruler of Tihāmat ʿAsīr. The meeting resulted in the agreement of al-Ḥafāʾir which set forth the following conditions:

- (a) Muḥammad al-Idrīsī to recognize Ottoman suzerainty.
- (b) Al-Idrīsī to be recognized as *qāʾimmaqām* in ʿAsīr.
- (c) Al-Idrīsī to assist the Ottomans in the work to extend the telegraph lines from the Yemen to the Ḥijāz.
- (d) Ottomans to collect taxes and duties in the port cities.
- (e) *Zakāt*, as according to the *sharīʿa*, to be reinstated as tax, to be collected by al-Idrīsī, who is to keep one-third of the amount collected.
- (f) Verdicts to be passed in accordance with the *sharīʿa*.<sup>89</sup>

86 See above, section of al-Idrīsī in Cairo. See also *al-Manār*, 16, 1913, 4, 301; al-ʿAqīlī, *Taʾrīkh al-Mikhlāf al-Sulaymānī*, 11, 664-5, and al-Shahhārī, *al-Muʿāmiʿ al-tawassuʿiyya*, 37.

87 On this meeting, and the agreement between the two sides, see al-ʿAqīlī, *Taʾrīkh al-Mikhlāf al-Sulaymānī*, 11, 665-7.

88 Al-Idrīsī, *Bayān li'l-nās*, see Appendix B.

89 This last point is mentioned by Baldry, 'Al-Yaman and the Turkish occupation', 184, and by al-Idrīsī in the *Bayān*, see Appendix B.

Al-Idrīsī thus agreed to acknowledge Ottoman overlordship in return for their concessions. This means that al-Idrīsī renounced his claim for full independence, at least for the time being. By the end of 1909 the situation in ʿAsīr was quiet. The Ottomans regarded the treaty of al-Ḥafāʾir as the end of the Idrīsī insurrection and the treaty was ratified by Istanbul in January 1910.<sup>90</sup>

In the course of the first half of 1910, the Ottomans left the administration of the Tihāma to al-Idrīsī, in accordance with the treaty. In this period al-Idrīsī cooperated with the Turks in their effort to extend a telegraph line from Ṣanʿāʾ northwards to the Ḥijāz. Al-Idrīsī also explains that he 'convinced the Arabs to pay light taxes in the name of *zakāt*' and that he cooperated with the Ottomans in other matters.<sup>91</sup>

Nevertheless, the ultimate power in the region still rested with the Turkish official functioning as *mutaṣarrif*, and the strong Turkish military presence, especially in the coastal cities, but also in Abhā and scattered garrisons in the interior. ʿAsīr was still a part of the Ottoman Vilayet al-Yaman, and al-Idrīsī was one of the shaykhs (albeit the principal one) with whom the Ottomans had thought it necessary to enter into a treaty.

### *Hostilities resumed: The autumn of 1910*

In October 1910 Idrīsī forces resumed military activity against Ottoman garrisons. At the same time the imam of Ṣanʿāʾ called for renewed rebellion in the Yemen. The renewal of hostilities forced the Turks to take severe action in the Yemen and reinforcements were shipped on a large scale to al-Ḥudayda.<sup>92</sup>

According to al-Idrīsī, the Turks had broken the agreement; thus he justifies his taking up arms again. The *Bayān* contains an elaborate explanation as to what constituted the Ottoman breaking of the agreement. This explanation is interesting for two reasons. Firstly, it reveals how insistent al-Idrīsī was about the implementation of the *sharīʿa*. He insists repeatedly that only the

<sup>90</sup> Baldry, 'Al-Yaman and the Turkish occupation', 184.

<sup>91</sup> Al-Idrīsī, *Bayān li'l-nās*, see Appendix B.

<sup>92</sup> Baldry, 'Al-Yaman and the Turkish occupation', 185.

*sharīʿa* can provide law and order for ʿAsīr. Secondly, he stresses that any treaty with the Ottomans will lead to no good for the Arab population, since from the outset they are unwilling to rule according to Islam. He thereby claims that the Ottomans were under no circumstances fit to rule in Arab lands. The argument about the *sharīʿa*, whether sincere or not, is an effective way to delegitimise a government to a Muslim people—thus it is used today by fundamentalists.

The treaty of al-Ḥafāʾir had stated that verdicts in ʿAsīr were to be passed on the basis of the *sharīʿa*, or at least that was how al-Idrīsī interpreted the treaty. According to al-Idrīsī, the Ottomans now decided that they would allow verdicts to be passed according to the *sharīʿa* in civil cases, but not in criminal cases, 'they declared that they granted privileges to the Muslims in the land, or they granted Muslims the favour of operating the *sharīʿa*—in civil cases but not in criminal cases'.<sup>93</sup> This meant that the Turks would allow *sharīʿa* rulings in cases relating to trade and similar, but they would not allow *sharʿī* punishments (*ḥudūd*) in criminal cases. To this al-Idrīsī responds with the rhetorical question: 'When was the *sharīʿa* implemented and its punishments were not (*matā kānat al-sharīʿa tuqāmu dhawna an tuqāmu ḥudūduhā*)?'

The conflict between al-Idrīsī and the Ottomans over the punishments of the *sharīʿa* was no surprise. As a result of the revolution of the Young Turks in 1908, the Ottoman sultan was forced to restore the constitution which had been drafted already in 1876, after Western models. The policy of the Young Turks was, in short, increased central control and modernization along Western lines.<sup>94</sup> For the Young Turks, the Ottoman Empire had no room for institutionalized blood-revenge and the like, as laid down in the *sharīʿa*. This became even clearer in the autumn of 1910, when an Idrīsī delegation travelled to Istanbul to discuss the implementation of *sharīʿa*.<sup>95</sup> The representatives of the Young Turks were not willing to consider the demands for

93 Al-Idrīsī, *Bayān li'l-nās*, see Appendix B.

94 On the revolution of the Young Turks, see B. Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*, London 1968, 175-238.

95 Baldry, 'Al-Yaman and the Turkish occupation', 185.



institutionalized *ḥudūd* punishments, not even for the sake of law and order in 'Asīr. Al-Idrīsī sums up the Turkish attitude by pointing out, not surprisingly, that, 'They began to abuse upholding the punishments of God and allowing the right [of revenge] and they said that urban circumstances did not allow this', and, 'They condemned those who continued the quest to implement these rules in criminal cases, and equally they condemned all those who contradicted their intentions and purposes and their new constitution and so on'.<sup>96</sup>

Some authors indicate that al-Idrīsī by signing the initial treaty of al-Ḥafā'ir was merely buying time,<sup>97</sup> and that he already had set his goal as the full independence of 'Asīr. In this perspective the simultaneous uprisings in the Yemen and 'Asīr originated in a secret agreement between al-Idrīsī and Imam Yaḥyā, who both had the same objective. It is difficult to assess the validity of these claims.

Following the renewed rebellion in 'Asīr, the entire region was in full revolt by the end of 1910. Idrīsī forces cut the telegraph line between Jizān and Maydī and proceeded to seize all Turkish fortifications in the vicinity of Ṣabyā, while al-Idrīsī's military success led to more tribal leaders joining him. This time the Ottomans were unable to defend their positions as they were pressed on all fronts. By the end of 1910, Turkish military control extended only to the garrison towns along the coast, while the interior was almost entirely controlled by the rebels, by tribal leaders loyal to either Muḥammad al-Idrīsī or to Imam Yaḥyā of Ṣan'ā'.

At this time, there are several indications that arms smuggled from the Italian colony of Eritrea were the main source of guns and ammunition for the 'Asīrī insurgents.<sup>98</sup> Apparently, Italian dealers from Maṣawwa' traded guns with British traders from Aden and subsequently forwarded these to Arabia.

<sup>96</sup> Al Idrīsī, *Bayān li'l-nās*, see Appendix B.

<sup>97</sup> Al Barakātī, 7 and Baldry, 'Al-Yaman and the Turkish occupation', 185.

<sup>98</sup> Hahiy, 'Imām Yaḥyā and the Yamani uprising', 57.

*The uprising of 1911 and the Ottoman expeditions*

Ottoman forces continued to meet with misfortune in the first months of 1911. The situation from the Turkish point of view was bleak; the situation had become so grave that Turkish troops in al-Luḥayya, Jizān and al-Qunfudha were unable to leave their barracks.<sup>99</sup> The city of Abhā had been beleaguered by Idrīsī partisans since November-December 1910, led by Muṣṭafā b. ʿAbd al-ʿĀl al-Idrīsī. The commander of the Ottoman army, Izzet Pasha, now requested the assistance of *sharīf* Ḥusayn of Mecca, who agreed to contribute a military expedition to crush the ʿAsīrī rebellion. The agreement was made that a large Ottoman army would advance into Idrīsī territory from the south (from Jizān), while a joint *sharīfian*-Ottoman army would advance from the north.<sup>100</sup>

The northern army managed, after much trouble, to reach their aim and conquer Abhā. Al-Idrīsī makes some cryptic allusions that their entry into Abhā was not due their military superiority, but rather to treachery and intrigue; 'I came to know that they were hiding the truth, and they started to claim that their entry (into Abhā) was by force, but we are wise Arabs and we are not concerned with the words of talkers when they are alone in remote lands'.<sup>101</sup>

The Ottoman army advancing from Jizān were heavily defeated by Idrīsī partisans defending their positions in the mountain areas inland of Jizān. Baldry reports that 1,000 Turkish soldiers were killed and 400 wounded.<sup>102</sup> Al-Idrīsī refers to the battle as 'the battle of al-Ḥafāʾir' taking place by the wells of al-Ḥafāʾir, three-quarters of an hour from Jizān, 'one Monday in the middle

99 Baldry, 'The Turkish-Italian War in the Yemen', 55.

100 The *sharīfian*-Ottoman expedition into ʿAsīr is thoroughly described by Barakātī, *al-Rihla al-Yamaniyya*. For what follows, see also Baldry, 'Al-Yaman and the Turkish occupation', 187; Baldry, 'The Turkish-Italian War in the Yemen', 55, and al-Shahhārī *al-Muṭāmmiʿ al-tawassuʿiyya*, 56-8.

101 Al-Idrīsī, *Bayān li'l-nās*, see Appendix B.

102 Baldry, 'The Turkish-Italian War', 55, based on FO882/10 and FO195/2254.

of Jumādā II 1329' [Mid-June 1911].<sup>103</sup> This was a decisive victory for the rebels in 'Asīr and Idrīsī forces seized large quantities of guns, ammunition and other military equipment.

The *sharīfian*-Ottoman expeditions into 'Asīr left the Idrīsī rebels victorious on all fronts. Idrīsī influence now encompassed also the mountain tribes, as well as the Tihāma as far south as al-Ḥudayda. His continued insistence on the implementation of the *sharī'a*, combined with his victories caused almost all the 'Asīrī chiefs to pledge allegiance to him.

Until this point the confrontation in 'Asīr had been one between the Ottoman authorities and the native tribes under the leadership of Muḥammad al-Idrīsī. Idrīsī contact with Western powers had been limited to the delivery of arms through Italian agents. Here it should be noted that there are no conclusive evidence of such contact, yet given al-Idrīsī's former contacts with the Italians, it is not unlikely that such deliveries took place from Maṣawwa' via the ports under Idrīsī control. The autumn of 1911 brought a new dimension to the conflict between the Ottomans and the 'Asīrī rebels, which now escalated to the international level.

*The Turco-Italian War of 1911-12: The implications for 'Asīr*

Italy declared war on the Ottoman Empire on 29 September 1911. The pretext for the war was the Italian invasion of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica in Libya, followed by Ottoman rejection of an Italian ultimatum not to resist the invading forces. It was in Italy's interest to spread the war to the Yemen, which had long been viewed as Italy's gateway to Arabia—an outlet and trading partner for the Italian settlements in Eritrea. On 2 October Italian warships attacked the Turks in the Yemen by shelling al-Ḥudayda and blockading the port.<sup>104</sup> Here, Italy faced opposition from several parties. Firstly, from the Ottoman rulers of the

[103] Al-Shahhārī states that the battle at al-Hafā'ir took place on 13 June 1911, al-Shahhārī, *al-Muḥāmi' al-tawassu'īyya*, 57-8.

[104] For details on what follows about the events taking place in the Yemen-'Asīr region; see Baldry, 'The Turkish-Italian war'.

Arabian *vilayets*. Secondly, from Great Britain which controlled Aden as well as the coastal emirates in the southeast Arabia and tended to view Arabia as an entirely British domain and the Red Sea as the main link between England and India. Thirdly, the imam of Ṣanʿāʾ who finally opted to remain loyal to the Ottomans in the Turco-Italian war, as the lesser of two evils. The imam and the Ottomans signed their friendship treaty, the Treaty of Daʿcān, in 1911. However, in the Yemen Italy also found some willing allies, the principal one being Muḥammad al-Idrīsī in ʿAsīr.

Al-Idrīsī joined the Italian cause immediately upon the outbreak of the Turco-Italian war, which lasted until the autumn of 1912, when the Ottomans were forced to sign the Treaty of Lausanne because of the growing unrest in the Balkans. It appears that al-Idrīsī, after the victory at al-Ḥafāʾir, was engaged in some sort of peace negotiation with the Ottomans.<sup>105</sup> These tentative attempts broke down upon the outbreak of the Turco-Italian war, which provided Idrīsī forces with secure delivery of arms and naval support from Italian warships. It seems certain that al-Idrīsī regarded the Italians as a means to obtain full independence from the Turks and expand his territory. The net result of the war was indeed Idrīsī expansion; his territory now included the Farasān Islands as well as the port cities of Ḥalī, Birk, Jizān, Maydī and other, smaller coastal cities. On another level, the war created a serious split between al-Idrīsī and the Imam Yaḥyā who remained loyal to the Ottomans.<sup>106</sup> During the war, the imam waged *jihād* on Italy, with the result that many Ḥāshid and Bakīl chiefs deserted the imam and enlisted as tribesmen for al-Idrīsī. The two were from this point on bitter enemies.

The Turco-Italian war revealed the willingness of al-Idrīsī to join any cause, even the infidel Italians, against the Ottomans. This may be somewhat difficult to explain, given the religious nature of the Idrīsī movement and the entire Idrīsī tradition. One

105 See reference in al-Idrīsī, *Bayān li'l-nās*, Appendix B.

106 Baldry reports that the imam's loyalty 'seems to have wavered' in April 1912, when the imam attempted join forces with al-Idrīsī. However, the imam was again won over to the Turkish side; 'The Turkish-Italian war', 59.

may here argue that the Idrīsī movement had long since moved beyond the initial 'mission of religious reform' and into practical politics. In the years before the First World War, especially on the fringes of the Ottoman Empire, almost all political activity would have to deal with the presence of one or more of the European powers. The political climate was that of *realpolitik*; each power did what would best serve its interests. It is within the realms of *realpolitik* that we best can explain Muḥammad al-Idrīsī's alliance with Italy, an alliance that is less unlikely when we take into consideration his early contact with the Italians in Maṣawwa<sup>c</sup> and Cairo.

The Turco-Italian war in the Yemen also contributed to deepen British mistrust of Italian ambitions in Arabia. Before the war, Britain had been less inclined to see Italy as a direct rival in Arabia, but after the war British representatives in Aden and in the Yemeni coastal cities strove to limit Italian influence. Therefore, the Italian intervention in the Yemen brought her few gains and Italy did not achieve her goal of opening markets on the eastern Red Sea shore. It seems fair to sum up the Turco-Italian war in the Yemen by saying that the only party who really gained was Muḥammad al-Idrīsī in ʿAsīr. He had demonstrated that, given the assistance of a foreign power, he could withstand Turkish military campaigns in ʿAsīr. Once the war was over, however, the Ottoman empire could be expected to concentrate all its forces on dealing with the ʿAsīrī insurgents once and for all. This did not happen, as Turkey was forced to send most of its military forces to the Balkan war, which broke out immediately after the Turkish-Italian war.<sup>107</sup>

### *Towards the World War: Negotiation and fighting*

The larger part of Ottoman military forces being tied up in the Balkans, the Ottomans saw it in their best interests to reach some

[107] In October 1912, the Balkan states Bulgaria, Serbia, Montenegro and Greece declared war on Turkey. The war came as a reaction against the centralization policy of the Young Turks. As the war ended in August-September 1913, Turkey had lost virtually all her European possessions.

sort of agreement with al-Idrīsī. As a first step towards peace negotiations, the Sublime Porte granted al-Idrīsī and his associates amnesty by an Imperial *iradé* in December 1912.<sup>108</sup> Istanbul also promised that all Idrīsī demands would be met if he ceased hostilities. Al-Idrīsī agreed.

In February 1913 an Ottoman delegation left Şan<sup>c</sup>ā' for Jizān to undertake negotiations with al-Idrīsī and his representatives. The delegation was headed by the *wālī* of the Yemen, Maḥmūd Nadīm Bey (now Pasha). In addition there participated notables from the Yemeni religious and scholarly class.<sup>109</sup> Negotiations were initiated in March 1913 but were quickly broken off. Contact was resumed in May. During these talks the Ottomans offered al-Idrīsī what can best be described as a protectorate treaty, similar to that the Ottomans had concluded with Imam Yaḥyā (the treaty of Da<sup>c</sup>cān of 1911).

Al-Idrīsī was offered control of all ports except the Farasān Islands and his territory was to be extended southwards. Turkey was not to interfere in internal affairs and all revenues of the land was to be kept by al-Idrīsī. In return al-Idrīsī was to acknowledge Ottoman overlordship and refrain from concluding treaties with foreign powers. Al-Idrīsī was also to refrain from flying the Idrīsī flag and instead fly the Ottoman banner.<sup>110</sup>

Instead of accepting these terms, al-Idrīsī made counterdemands; the Idrīsī territory was to include Farasān Islands. In addition he claimed the right to conclude agreements with foreign powers on concessions and the right to issue his own currency, and that Arabic be the official language (*al-lughā al-rasmiyya*) of the state. He also repeated the demand that verdicts should be passed in accordance with the *sharī'a*. Maḥmūd Nadīm could not accept these demands and the talks were broken off.<sup>111</sup>

<sup>108</sup> Baldry, 'Al-Yaman and the Turkish Occupation', 192.

<sup>109</sup> Al-Shahhārī names three of them: Husayn Kamāl Effendī, Al-Sayyid Qāsim al-<sup>c</sup>Azī and the *qāḍī* <sup>c</sup>Abd al-Karīm Aḥmad Muṭahir; *al-Muṭāmi' al-tawassu'iyya*, 80-1.

<sup>110</sup> According to Jacobs, the Idrīsī flag was 'of green cloth, and the legend it carried were the words of the Moslem *Kalima*, and the additional words, *wa'l-Idrīsī waliulla*; 'and the Idrisi, the saint of Allah'; *Kings of Arabia*, 134.

<sup>111</sup> Al-Sayyid, *Asīr fī 'alāqāt*, 19.

Immediately hostilities resumed. The imam, seeing the decline of Ottoman power in the Yemen, realized that the Ottomans were no longer able to honour the treaty of Da<sup>ʿ</sup>an. He therefore concluded a treaty with the *sharīf* of Mecca, and together the two attacked al-Qunfudha in August 1913 (the imam had first approached al-Idrīsī with the suggestion of an alliance, but al-Idrīsī declined). This time Idrīsī forces faced more serious opposition than in the previous confrontations, as they were opposed by the imam, the *sharīf* and the remaining Turkish troops. Again, Idrīsī partisans seem to have received their weapons and ammunition from Italian agents in Eritrea. Stuhlmann indicates that al-Idrīsī received supplies from 'Latin' plotters on the western Red Sea shore.<sup>112</sup>

The Ottomans responded by blockading the entire ʿAsīrī coast and thereby cutting Idrīsī territory off from supplies from the sea. This proved to be an effective step as the blockade was heavily felt within Idrīsī territory by early 1914. Both food and arms were lacking and consequently several tribes deserted the Idrīsī cause.<sup>113</sup> The Ottomans also put a price on al-Idrīsī's head.<sup>114</sup>

In response, al-Idrīsī in July 1914 sent an envoy to Istanbul carrying a letter to the authorities. The head of this delegation was a certain Doctor ʿIzzat Effendī al-Jindī, 'a friend of al-Idrīsī'.<sup>115</sup> In the accompanying letter, al-Idrīsī pledged to accept Ottoman overlordship, that is to fly the Ottoman flag and read the Friday prayers in the name of the sultan as caliph. In return al-Idrīsī demanded to be recognized as hereditary *amīr* of ʿAsīr and that no Turkish civil servants nor troops be sent to ʿAsīr.

It is unclear what came of this initiative. We do not know of any treaty being concluded between the Idrīsī delegation and the Ottomans before the outbreak of the war, yet it may be reasonable to guess that the Ottomans now were inclined to grant liberal concessions to the Idrīsī. It seems that the negotiations never reached a conclusion; in effect the Idrīsī state was neither

<sup>112</sup> Stuhlmann, *Kampf um Arabien*, 107.

<sup>113</sup> Baldry, 'Al-Yaman and the Turkish occupation', 195.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 194.

<sup>115</sup> Stuhlmann, *Kampf um Arabien*, 107-8.

recognized nor destroyed by the Ottomans who were entirely preoccupied with the fast developing events on the international scene.

Not so with the imam, who now felt in the position to claim sovereignty over the Tihāma, which he had always regarded as his ancestral right. Military confrontation continued between the imam and Idrīsī forces throughout July 1914. On 3 August, the Ottoman authorities forced the imam to observe a truce with the Idrīsī. The next day Britain declared war on Germany, and in November, after much hesitation, the Ottoman Empire joined the Central Powers against the Allies.

### *The First World War; the Idrīsī state and Great Britain*

Upon the outbreak of the war, Britain started to work actively to recruit allies among the Arabs. The Consul-general of Egypt, Lord Kitchener, now a member of the war cabinet in London, was one of the most eager promoters of this idea. He encouraged the High Commissioner in Egypt, Sir Henry McMahon, to engage in negotiations with the *sharīf* Ḥusayn of Mecca, which ended by the *sharīf* declaring the much-famed 'Arab revolt' in 1916.<sup>116</sup> The *sharīf* of Mecca was Britain's most prestigious ally and his call for revolt resounded in the central Arabs lands, such as Syria, Palestine and Iraq.

On the Arabian peninsula, Britain was equally eager to conclude alliances, especially since the imam of Ṣanʿāʾ seemed determined to remain loyal to the Ottomans. In Muḥammad al-Idrīsī, Britain found a willing ally. His battle against the Turkish overlords had been going on for seven years (from 1907 to 1914) and although his independence had not been formally recognized anywhere, he was the *de facto* ruler in ʿAsīr. Al-Idrīsī had, through his cousin Sayyid Muṣṭafā b. ʿAbd al-ʿĀl, made overtures to the British in Aden already in 1913.<sup>117</sup> In

116 These negotiations are known as 'The Husayn-McMahon correspondence' and are reproduced in J.C. Hurewitz (ed.), *The Middle East and North Africa in World Politics: A documentary record, 11, 1914-1945*, New Haven 1975, 46-56.

117 Baldry, 'The Turkish-Italian War', 63.



April 1915 Sayyid Muṣṭafā and the political resident at Aden, Major-General Shaw signed a 'Treaty of Friendship and Goodwill'. Muḥammad al-Idrīsī was thus the first Arab leader to join the British cause against the Ottoman Empire.<sup>118</sup>

This treaty is the only document we know of which formally recognizes al-Idrīsī's position in 'Asīr. In the document he is referred to as 'The Idrīsī Saiyid and Amir of Sabia and its environments'.<sup>119</sup> The main objective of the treaty is war against Turkey and al-Idrīsī promises to attack Turkish troops throughout 'Asīr. The treaty specifically states that his attacks are to be directed against the Turks only—not against the imam. In return Britain pledges to provide arms and ammunition. Point five in the treaty says, 'The British Government undertakes to safeguard the Idrisi Saiyid's territory from all attack on the seaboard from any enemy who may molest him; to guarantee his independence in his own domain and at the conclusion of the war use every diplomatic means in its power to adjudicate between the rival claims of the Idrisi Saiyid and the Imam Yahya or any other rival'. From the Idrīsī point of view, the treaty with Britain was the definite step away from Ottoman rule. The Idrīsī territory was now an independent entity, guaranteed by the British Government.

It seems that it was al-Idrīsī's cousin Muṣṭafā who was the most ardent spokesman for an alliance with Great Britain, and it was also he who undertook all direct contact with the British representatives at Aden. The report on 'Asīr by Rihani describes Sayyid Muṣṭafā as 'much pro-English' and he also reports that Muṣṭafā made a large fortune during the war which he invested in Egypt.<sup>120</sup> It seems clear that the Egyptian Adārīsa, of which Muṣṭafā b. 'Abd al-'Āl was one, had a special position with the British in Egypt, through the Idrīsī centre at al-Zayniyya. During

<sup>118</sup> Later, Sharif Ḥusayn joined. Another British ally, the emerging state of Ibn Sa'ūd, kept a low profile during the war. For details on Sa'ūdī history in this period, see D. Holden and R. Johns, *The House of Saud*, London 1982, 1-63.

<sup>119</sup> The English text of the treaty is reproduced in C.U. Aitchison, *A collection of treaties, Engagements and Sanads Relating to India and neighbouring countries*, Dehli 1933, Kraus reprint 1973, 177.

<sup>120</sup> Rihani, 'Report on 'Asīr' in Sinclair, *Documents on the History of South West Arabia*, 1, 82.

the war, Great Britain offered the Idrīsī family cash payments and financial rewards for their cooperation.<sup>121</sup>

During the war, Idrīsī soldiers honoured the treaty by engaging in guerrilla warfare against Turkish garrisons all over ‘Asīr. In 1915 they captured the Farasān Islands from the Turks, and an additional treaty was signed with Britain in 1917 in which the Farasān Islands are recognized as ‘part and parcel of the Idrisi’s domains, in all of which his independence is assured’.<sup>122</sup> The Farasān Islands were important to the British as anchorages, and Britain was wary of Italian moves to take possession of the islands. The islands had another important attraction, namely oil. In 1914, while the islands were still in Turkish possession, the British-based company Farsan Oil Company Ltd. had been granted a concession to exploit oil in Farasān. After the Idrīsī takeover of the islands, the question as to whether this concession was to be considered valid, remained unanswered throughout the war.<sup>123</sup>

121 Muṣṭafā was instrumental to British policy as he acted as mediator and liaison between the British and Muḥammad al-Idrīsī. In this regard, he held much the same position as his brother Muḥammad al-Sharīf b. ‘Abd al-‘Āl who was recruited by Britain to serve as mediator with the Sanūsīyya in Cyrenaica. Both brothers enjoyed a ‘special relationship’ with Britain; see F. De Jong, ‘The Ṣūfī Orders in Egypt during the ‘Urābī insurrection and the British occupation (1882-1914): Some societal factors generating aloofness, support, and opposition’, *Journal of the Americal Research Center in Egypt*, xxi, 1984, 137, citing P.R.O., F.O. 141/814 (file 3665).

122 The English text of the Anglo-Idrīsī Supplementary Treaty is reproduced in Aitchison, *A collection of treaties*, 178-9.

123 For details on the issue of oil concession on the Farasān Islands, see Baldry, ‘Power and Mineral Concessions’, 51-65.

## 6

### THE AFTERMATH OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR: THE FALL OF THE IDRĪSĪ STATE 1918-1934

As the First World War ended, the Ottoman Empire fell. Great Britain and France had already divided the former Ottoman regions of Syria, Iraq, Lebanon and Palestine between themselves. These regions became the League of Nation's mandates under British or French administration.<sup>1</sup>

As the war ended, the scene on the Arabian Peninsula was open for inter-Arab rivalry and it became clear that Britain was unable to honour all her wartime pledges. This was to lead to the downfall of the Idrīsī state.

A British/Turkish cease-fire was observed from October 1918. In early 1919 Britain was in occupation of al-Luḥayya, al-Ḥudayda and Kamrān Island. In the course of 1919, al-Luḥayya was handed over to the Idrīsī government. British troops remained on Kamrān Island, which was considered an important facility for deep water anchorage. In 1921, al-Ḥudayda was also handed over to al-Idrīsī and the Idrīsī territory thereby reached its widest borders.

It is in the years directly after the First World War that we can refer to the Idrīsī territory as a *state*. As the Ottomans withdrew, the Idrīsī cause was no longer that of rebellion or resistance, instead the cause was now to organize and maintain a state. In this task the Idrīsī leaders enjoyed British support, due to the Anglo-Idrīsī treaty concluded during the war.

<sup>1</sup> The post-war partition of the Ottoman Empire was agreed upon in the Sykes-Picot agreement, which was first clarified in October 1916.

*Inside the Idrīsī state*

The Idrīsī state was an imamate in which Muḥammad al-Idrīsī held absolute power.<sup>2</sup> He was the religious and political head of state and the highest legislative authority. During the years of struggle against the Turks and throughout the war, all orders and commands ultimately came from him. During the war, the state had three ministers, but al-ʿAqilī states that these were without any real authority or power.<sup>3</sup> In the early years, al-Idrīsī undertook all correspondence himself, but later he appointed two scholars to assist in this task.

All matters of law were at first dealt with by Muḥammad al-Idrīsī himself. As the Idrīsī movement gradually developed into a state there was appointed a high court (*maḥkama ʿulyā*) headed by the *qādī* Muḥammad Ḥaydar al-Qābī. To execute the law there was established a police force, mainly recruited from the Sudanese population, for inspection of the *sūq* and surveillance of public morals and conducting of prayers etc. Cafés were forbidden on Idrīsī territory, as were smoking and dancing.<sup>4</sup> The general impression conveyed by the few foreign visitors is that of puritanism and strict enforcement of Islamic law in matters related to public behaviour and social life.

The finances of the Idrīsī state relied on the collection of

- 2 The internal administration of the Idrīsī state is treated by al-ʿAqilī, *Taʾriḫ al-Mikhlāf al-Sulaymānī*, II, 819-32. European literature refers to al-Idrīsī as 'Emir' and the Idrīsī territory as an 'Emirate', such as for instance in the Anglo-Idrīsī treaty. This is a title implying political leadership, corresponding to the title of prince or governor. Al-Idrīsī himself used the title 'imam', and this is the title used in the later treaties with Ibn Saʿūd. The title 'imam' has more religious connotations; the *imām* being e.g. the person who leads the Friday prayers.
- 3 Al-ʿAqilī, *ibid.*, 826. The three ministers were assigned different tasks, such as dealing with matters related to the tribes, recruitment of tribal soldiers etc. The names of these three ministers are given by al-ʿAqilī (p. 827); Ḥummūd Sirdāb, Muḥammad Yaḥyā Bāṣuḥī and Yaḥyā Zirkī al-Ḥukmī, i.e., three of the four persons who had formed the first Idrīsī government.
- 4 Rosita Forbes, 'A visit to the Idrisi territory in ʿAsir and Yemen', *The Geographical Journal*, LXII, 4, 1923, 272.

*zakāt* on grain and livestock. In the central regions *zakāt* was collected regularly, whereas other regions, such as the Rijāl al-Mā<sup>c</sup> did not pay any tax at all to the Idrisī treasury. Other important sources of income were custom duties levied in the big coastal cities, and revenues of the salt mines at al-Ṣāliḥ. The main source of income to the Idrisī *bayt al-māl* during the war was foreign support, for the most part British financial contributions. Also after the war, Great Britain continued to contribute to Idrisī finances.<sup>5</sup>

In every city there was established an administrative council, a total number of twenty-one units,<sup>6</sup> meant to undertake local government, consisting of state officials, local *qāḍīs*, commissioners of the *bayt al-māl*, military officials and chiefs of the local community. To ensure the loyalty of the local chiefs, al-Idrisī applied the same method as the imam of Ṣan<sup>c</sup>ā<sup>3</sup>, namely keeping the sons of prominent chiefs as hostages in Ṣahyā or Jizān.<sup>7</sup> The local councils were directly responsible to Muḥammad al-Idrisī, except for the southern districts where he was represented by Muṣṭafā al-Idrisī. Contact was maintained by regular correspondence; letters giving al-Idrisī's orders were carried back and forth by messengers.

After the departure of the Turks, a *dīwān* was set up, consisting of a group of former Ottoman officials (*muwazzafū 'l-dawla al-sālifa*).<sup>8</sup> The head of the *dīwān* was Kāmil Effendī, formerly an employee of the *vilayet* of Ṣan<sup>c</sup>ā<sup>3</sup>. There were attempts to reform the government and organize the state along more modern lines. In connection with this reform there was established several ministries; Ministry of foreign affairs (*al-khārijīyya*), Ministry of the interior (*al-daklūliyya*), Ministry of War (*al-ḥarbiyya*) and Ministry of justice (*al-ʿadl*).<sup>9</sup> Sayyid Muṣṭafā al-Idrisī was appointed prime minister (*riyāsa al-*

<sup>5</sup> See al-ʿAqlī, *Taʾriḫ al-Mikhlāf al-Sulaymānī*, II, 826-7 and Cornwallis, *Asir before World War I*, 15-24.

<sup>6</sup> Forbes, 'A visit to the Idrisī territory', 274.

<sup>7</sup> Al-ʿAqlī, *Taʾriḫ al-Mikhlāf al-Sulaymānī*, II, 828.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 826.

<sup>9</sup> The ministers appointed were (respectively): Muḥammad Yahyā Bāsuhī, Yahyā Zirkī, Ḥumūd Sirdāb, Muḥammad Haydar al-Qabī; al-ʿAqlī, *ibid.*, 829.

wizāra). The other two representatives of the 'Egyptian branch' of the Idrīsī family also functioned as state officials. Sayyid al-ʿArabī was governor of al-Ḥudayda at the time of Amin Rihani's visit in 1922, while Sayyid Sanūsī served as advisor to Muḥammad al-Idrīsī.<sup>10</sup>

This reform also included an attempt to establish a regular standing army (*jaysh niẓāmī*), but this was never realised. The military defence of the Idrīsī state remained dependent on raising tribal soldiers. In times of war, al-Idrīsī could muster some where between 20,000 and 50,000 soldiers, for the most part partisans with little discipline, equipped with rifles.<sup>11</sup>

### *1919-1923: The years of rivalry*

As stated above, the Idrīsī state reached its greatest territorial extension after the Ottoman withdrawal following the First World War. However, its borders were far from undisputed, in fact the only uncontested frontier of the Idrīsī territory was the Red Sea to the west. With the Ottoman Empire gone, four successor rulers had to settle their borders between them. Britain, whose ultimate goal it was to deny other outside powers access to Arabia, would have to manœuvre so that none of the kings of Arabia sought other European assistance in their rivalries, especially not from Italy. In the years immediately after the war, Britain attempted to follow such a course of tactical manœuvring between the rivals.

### *The Idrīsī state and the Yemen*

The Yemen became an independent nation through the peace accords of 1919, under the rule of the Imam Yaḥyā in Ṣanʿāʾ. As

10 Rihani, 'Report' in Sinclair, *Documents*, 81-2. Sayyid al-ʿArabī is described by Rihani as an 'incapable but very amiable man' whereas Sayyid Sanūsī is labelled 'reticent and unassuming'.

11 Forbes states that in case of emergency the Idrīsī government could muster 30,000 men; 'A visit to the Idrisi territory', 274. In his report (p. 83), Rihani assesses the number to be 30,000 to 40,000 men, some trained in the use of machine guns and artillery, but most not.

the war ended, fighting between imamate and Idrīsī forces continued in the border areas.<sup>12</sup> When Britain handed over al-Luḥayya and al-Ḥudayda to al-Idrīsī, this was very much to the dismay of the imam, who saw (at least) al-Ḥudayda as an integral part of the Yemen; access to the sea was a vital point for the imam. In this conflict, al-Idrīsī received British support. Britain had its own ongoing conflict with the imam who undertook occasional raids into the British-controlled territory surrounding Aden. It is unclear to what extent Britain really supported the Idrīsī cause against the imam in this period, in terms of arms and money. Certainly, by the text of the Anglo-Idrīsī treaty, Britain was committed to guaranteeing Idrīsī independence against all rivals. In the early years it seems that Britain fulfilled this promise, and in his report Rihani writes, 'the Idrisi ... still receives arms and ammunition to fight the imam of San'a'.<sup>13</sup> Idrīsī-imamate warfare continued on and off throughout the years 1919-1923.

### *The Idrīsī state and the sharīf of Mecca*

As the war ended, the Hashemites of Mecca stood ready to claim their reward as 'liberators' of the Arabs, and consolidate the Arab kingdom envisioned in the Ḥusayn-McMahon correspondence. From the point of view of *sharīf* Ḥusayn, his Arab kingdom was to be established with British support, even though the *sharīf's* trust in Britain had been severely undermined by the publication of the Sykes-Picot Agreement and the Balfour Declaration. The question was the territorial extent of the Hashemite state. To the east lay the territory of Najd, controlled by the arch-enemy Ibn Sa'ūd, to the south lay the Idrīsī territory of 'Asīr, both of them British wartime allies.

According to the peace treaty of Paris, *sharīf* Ḥusayn was given the title 'King of Ḥijāz', and the *sharīf* endeavoured to enlarge the definition of 'Ḥijāz' as far as possible. The region inland of al-Qunfudha was where Idrīsī and *sharīfian* influence

12 What follows is based on Rihani, 'Report', 87-97 and Clive Leatherdale, *Britain and Saudi Arabia*, London 1983, 136-43.

13 Rihani, 'Report', 81.

met, and here the *sharīf* traditionally had a strong influence among the tribes of Ghamd, Banī Shirīr and others.<sup>14</sup> Another issue of dispute was the town of al-Qunfudha which was held by the *sharīf* but claimed by al-Iḍrīsī.

*The Iḍrīsī state and the Āl Saʿūd*

Saʿūdī ambitions were hindered by the presence of the *sharīf* and al-Iḍrīsī, who together controlled some of the most fertile areas on the Arabian Peninsula, the *wādīs* towards the Red Sea.<sup>15</sup> Ibn Saʿūd chose to remain patient, in order to maintain a good relationship with his partner Britain and thus tried to restrain the feared *ikhwān*, the Wāhhābī brotherhood, from attacking camps and villages outside Najd proper. However, he was soon presented with an opportunity to intervene in ʿAsīr and expand his influence towards the southwest.

As described earlier, the mountain regions of ʿAsīr (ʿAsīr al-Sarāh) had been part of the first Wāhhābī state in the nineteenth century and its inhabitants were sympathetic towards the renewed Saʿūdī influence. Al-ʿAqīlī specifically mentions that the tribes Qaḥṭān and Shahrān harboured Wāhhābī sympathies.<sup>16</sup> In 1911, the Ottomans had installed Ḥasan b. ʿAlī b. ʿĀʾid, descendant of the ʿĀʾid b. Marʿī who had fought the Ottomans in the nineteenth century, as governor of Abhā.<sup>17</sup> As the Ottomans withdrew, the Āl ʿĀʾid endeavoured to achieve supremacy in the region. Ḥasan b. ʿAlī was a friend of the *sharīf* of Mecca and it is possible that the attempt was supported by the *sharīf* who was eager to gain influence south of the Ḥijāz. The neighbouring tribes reacted against the Āl ʿĀʾid and appealed to

14 See Cornwallis, *Asir before World War I*, 25. The *sharīf* is said to have been connected to these tribes by marriage and personal friendships.

15 On the general history of the Saʿūdīs after the First World War, see Holden and Johns, *House of Saud*, 61-95 and Leatherdale, *Britain and Saudi Arabia*, 136-60. On the specifics of the Saʿūdī expansion into ʿAsīr, see al-ʿAqīlī, *Taʾrīkh al-Mikhhlāf al-Sulaymānī*, II, 741-2 and al-Shahhārī, *al-Muṭāmiʿ al-tawassuʿiyya*, 99-100.

16 Al-ʿAqīlī, *Taʾrīkh al-Mikhhlāf al-Sulaymānī*, II, 741.

17 Al-Shahhārī, *al-Muṭāmiʿ al-tawassuʿiyya*, 99.



Ibn Saʿūd for assistance.

In 1920 Ibn Saʿūd sent an expedition to ʿAsīr al-Sarāh to relieve the mountain tribes, and in April-May 1920 Saʿūdī troops defeated Ḥasan b. ʿĀʾid in the vicinity of Abhā. The leaders of the Saʿūdī troops were Ibn Saʿūd's young son Fayṣal b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, as well as ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz b. Musāʿid, a cousin of Ibn Saʿūd.<sup>18</sup> Eventually Ibn Saʿūd sent a delegation to al-Idrīsī and during the summer of 1920 the two parties negotiated a settlement of ʿAsīr al-Sarāh.<sup>19</sup>

A treaty was concluded between the two sides in the autumn of 1920 which declares, 'It is thus necessary to specify the tribes and define them in order that each may undertake the duties enjoined by God regarding the subjects under his hand'.<sup>20</sup> The two rulers then proceeded to divide the various tribes between them. Ibn Saʿūd took over the mountain tribes of Qaḥṭān, Shahrān, Wādīʿa and Rufayda, to name the most influential. Al-Idrīsī is granted sovereignty over the Tihāma tribes, the Rijāl al-Māʿ included. The treaty also bound the two parties not to interfere in the affairs of the other and to seek collaboration and friendship.

It seems that both the Saʿūdīs and the Idrīsīs gained from this agreement, as it pacified the allies of their common rival, King Ḥusayn of the Ḥijāz. From the Idrīsī point of view it meant that the Idrīsīs no longer were responsible for the troublesome ʿĀʾid family. The cost was the size of the Idrīsī territory.

There is some confusion concerning the date of this treaty. The actual text of the agreement is dated 16 Dhū 'l-Ḥijja 1338/30 August 1920 and it lays down the borders between the Saʿūdī and Idrīsī areas. The later protectorate treaty between Ibn Saʿūd

18 Al-ʿAqilī, *Taʾrīkh al-Mikhlaḥ al-Sulaymānī*, II, 742.

19 Al-Shahhārī, *ibid.*, states that this delegation was headed by Fayṣal b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz. This is confirmed by Holden and Jones, *House of Saud*, 76, who say that the young Fayṣal (around 16 years of age) took part in the ʿAsīrī campaign after having returned from a lengthy trip of Europe and Britain as a guest of the British government.

20 The Arabic text of this treaty can be found in Amīn Saʿid, *Tārīkh al-Dawla al-Saʿūdīyya*, Riyāḍ, 1972, 399. An English translation is reproduced in *British and foreign state papers*: 135, 1932, CXXXV, London 1937, 377-8.

and Ḥasan al-Idrīsī refers to the borders laid down in the treaty of 10 Ṣafar 1339/24 October 1920. Rosita Forbes, who visited the Idrīsī territory in 1922, makes a reference to an agreement by which goods to or from Najd were to pass through 'Asīrī ports duty-free, in return for Ibn Sa'ūd's guarantee of the eastern borders of the Idrīsī territory.<sup>21</sup> The text of the treaty of 30 August 1920 mentions no such arrangement.

This may lead us to speculate if we are here dealing with two different agreements with different dates. It may be that the free passage of goods which Forbes observed was part of a general, unwritten agreement to hasten the shipment of goods to famine-threatened Najd. In any event, the dates differ by less than two months and the frontiers of the Idrīsī territory described by Forbes correspond well with those laid down in the Idrīsī-Sa'ūdī agreement.

The Idrīsī state now extended from Al-Ḥudayda in the south to Birk in the north. In the interior, the border ran from Muḥā'il and southwards, and thus excluded Abhā and the territories of the mountain tribes.<sup>22</sup> The Sa'ūdī border thus extended to Muḥā'il and towards the Red Sea and al-Qunfudha, where Idrīsī, Hashemite and Sa'ūdī influence met.

In 1922, there was an attempt to establish a three-party agreement between Muḥammad al-Idrīsī, King Ḥusayn of the Ḥijāz and the Imam Yaḥyā, in order to secure the borders between them and at the same time secure their territories from potential Sa'ūdī expansion. Amin Rihani writes that during his interviews with al-Idrīsī, he completed a draft for an agreement to be sent to King Ḥusayn in Mecca.<sup>23</sup> In the end, the King did not sign any agreement, either with al-Idrīsī or the imam, and nothing came out of these tentative attempts, hindered by rivalry and animosity.

21 Forbes, 'A visit to the Idrisi territory', 274.

24 See map produced by Forbes, *ibid.*, 273, and tribal map produced by Cornwallis, *Asir before World War I*.

23 Rihani, 'Report', 80.

*The death of Muḥammad al-Idrīsī*

On 6 Shaʿbān 1341/24 March 1924, Muḥammad al-Idrīsī died at the age of 46 or 47. At his death he had been the head of the ʿAsīrī Adārīsa for 16 years (1907-23) and in the course of this period established a separate Idrīsī state in the region. By contemporary European sources, he is described as a man of remarkable intelligence, with a good command of Arabic and impressive personal stature.<sup>24</sup>

A small glimpse of the physical appearance of this man is given by Rihani, yet the following description must be taken for what it is—the observations of an outside observer who applied his own judgements: ‘Saiyed Muhammad ibn Ali ibn Muhammad ibn Ahmad ibn Idris, the mercy of Allah upon them all, was a man of huge proportions and a strangely composite physiognomy. The only negroid features, beside his colour, were his lips and perhaps his nose, which was not, however, emphatically flat. His broad forehead and his graceful hands might have been either Arian or Semitic, and the only unpleasantness—an incongruity, considering his stature and station—was his piping voice.’<sup>25</sup>

Al-ʿAqīlī relates that the burial of Muḥammad al-Idrīsī was postponed for two days before he was carried from Ṣabyā al-Idrīsīyya to ‘old Ṣabyā’ (Ṣabyā al-qadīma) and laid to rest at the family burial-place.<sup>26</sup> It is unclear if by the family burial place is meant the tomb erected for Aḥmad b. Idrīs, where Muḥammad

<sup>24</sup> Bury, *Arabia Infelix*, 22: ‘He is said to be a man of education with some knowledge of English ... Nevertheless he is a man of affairs, and overland pilgrims declare that the roads in Asir are safer than in Turkish Yemen’. Rihani (*Around the Coasts*, 185): ‘... gradually, as he spoke, I was drawn to the man and my admiration was undivided’. Jacobs gives some British reservation to his appraisal of al-Idrīsī: ‘He was a good friend, and a staunch believer in the good faith of the British nation’, *Kings of Arabia*, 184. Jacobs also describes the impression al-Idrīsī made on him: ‘[al-Idrīsī] was a man of magnificent physical proportions, and he carried himself regally. His smile was bewitching’; *ibid.*, 182-3.

<sup>25</sup> Rihani, *Around the coasts*, 185.

<sup>26</sup> Al-ʿAqīlī, *Taʾrikh al-Mikhlāf al-Sulaymānī*, II, 848.

al-Quṭb was also buried. The reason for this uncertainty is an episode related by Reissner, which took place shortly before al-Idrīsī's death, when al-Idrīsī ordered the destruction of the vault over his great-grandfather's grave. According to the report, al-Idrīsī explained his followers that Aḥmad had come to him in a dream and demanded that he construct a more prominent shrine.<sup>27</sup> This report cited by Reissner is contradicted by later information, as oral information from the Adārisa family states that the shrine of Ibn Idrīs was never demolished and that it is still standing in Ṣabyā.<sup>28</sup>

Muḥammad al-Idrīsī left five sons, the eldest of whom was the eighteen-year old 'Alī, born in 1905 in Dongola in the Sudan, to the daughter of Shaykh Hārūn Ṭawīl of the Aḥmadiyya.<sup>29</sup> He spent his first eight years in the Sudan before he travelled to Ṣabyā with his mother in 1332/1913-4.<sup>30</sup> There he started his education in the traditional Islamic subjects of Qur'ān, *ḥadīth*, *fiqh* and language.<sup>31</sup>

Besides the eldest Idrīsī son, there were other possible heirs to the Idrīsī imamate. Firstly, there was the cousin Muṣṭafā al-Idrīsī, who was in Cairo when Muḥammad al-Idrīsī died, a telegram was sent for him to return to 'Asīr immediately.<sup>32</sup> His views had been pro-British ever since the beginning of the war, when he negotiated the Anglo-Idrīsī treaty. Secondly, there were the two brothers of Muṣṭafā, Sayyid Sanūsī and Sayyid al-'Arabī. Thirdly, there was the brother of Muḥammad al-Idrīsī, Ḥasan b. 'Alī al-Idrīsī. He had not been very active in the politi-

27 Reissner, 'Die Idrīsiden in 'Asīr', 182; based on 'Abd al-Wāsi' b. Yaḥyā al-Wāsi'ī, *Tārikh al-Yaman*, Cairo 1972, 339, and Ḥusayn b. Aḥmad al-'Arshī, *Bulūgh al-Marām fī sharḥ Misk al-khitām fī man tawallā mulk al-Yaman min malik wa-imām*, Cairo 1939, 110.

28 Oral information, courtesy of Albrecht Hofheinz and R.S. O'Fahey.

29 See above, Chapter 4, on al-Idrīsī's travels.

30 Al-'Aqilī, *Tā'rikh al-Mikhlaḥ al-Sulaymānī*, II, 848.

31 Among the shaykhs who taught him were Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ 'Abd al-Ḥaqq, Muḥammad al-Amin al-Shinqīṭī and 'Alī b. Muḥammad al-Sanūsī; *ibid.*, 848.

32 Muṣṭafā had stayed in Cairo for a year, apparently to try to produce a settlement via the British representatives in Cairo. Amin Rihani met him in February 1922 at the Hotel Continental where he (Muṣṭafā) stayed as a guest of the British Government; Rihani, 'Report', 82.

cal administration of the Idrīsī state as he was essentially a religious person devoted to the teachings of his great-grandfather.

An assembly of notables (*ijtimā' dhū 'l-ra'y*) gathered in Ṣabyā to select the successor.<sup>33</sup> The assembly first decided to offer the succession to al-Idrīsī's brother Ḥasan, a selection designated to avoid a succession dispute between the sons of al-Idrīsī and the 'Egyptian branch'. However, Ḥasan refused the offer, on the ground that he held no desire for temporal power.<sup>34</sup>

Thus, the succession passed to 'Alī, the eighteen-year old son of Muḥammad al-Idrīsī, who acceded to the imamate in March 1923. This was an election which opened the way for internal divisions within the Idrīsī family. Muṣṭafā was the main rival, and he installed himself at al-Ḥudayda. The 'Egyptian branch' was not very popular among the 'Asīrī natives, possibly due to their benevolent attitude towards European powers in general, and, on the part of Muṣṭafā, Great Britain in particular.<sup>35</sup>

### *1923-26: Internal Idrīsī rivalry*

The new Imam 'Alī was young and is described by all sources as weak and lacking in personality. Thus he was considered an easy target for Italian commercial agents who immediately approached the new imam with a request to open a consulate in al-Ḥudayda.<sup>36</sup> To obtain this goal, the Italians sent Ja'far al-

<sup>33</sup> The participants and various fractions of this assembly are listed by al-'Aqilī, *Ta'rikh al-Mikhlaḥ al-Sulaymānī*, II, 851.

<sup>34</sup> Rihani, *Around the coasts of Arabia*, 168 and al-Shahhārī, *al-Muqāmi' al-tawassu'iyya*, 123. Al-'Aqilī does not mention anything about Ḥasan being offered the imamate. In this instance, Rihani's report stating that Ḥasan refused the imamate seems most reliable, as it is a contemporary report written shortly after the event took place.

<sup>35</sup> See Rihani, 'Report', 83.

<sup>36</sup> Italian activity in the Yemen and 'Asīr greatly increased after the war, and especially after Mussolini called for Italy's expansion eastwards. An increasing number of Italian ships called at al-Ḥudayda and by the end of 1924 a number of Italian commercial enterprises were established at al-Ḥudayda. All of this was a cause of concern for British

Mirghani<sup>37</sup> to 'Asīr as an intermediary, as they knew him to have 'great influence over Sayyid 'Alī'.<sup>38</sup> Again we see how that foreign powers made use of the 'Idrīsī network' when dealing with the Adārisa in 'Asīr. However, the Italian agent was expelled from al-Ḥudayda by Muṣṭafā who remained in favour of Britain as the main power in 'Asīr, claiming that the opening of an Italian consulate would be a violation of the Anglo-Idrīsī treaty. This deepened the divide between Muṣṭafā and 'Alī.

In April 1924, Muṣṭafā declared 'Alī deposed and installed himself as ruler in al-Ḥudayda. This led to open confrontation between the two parties, and in the course of the summer of 1924, 'Alī regained control of the Tihāma. In September 'Alī agreed to the opening of an Italian consulate in al-Ḥudayda after much pressure from the Italian side.<sup>39</sup>

Disunity persisted among the Idrīsīs until early 1926, when 'Alī was deposed by his uncle Ḥasan, with help from the Sa'ūdī governor at Abhā. 'Alī then went into exile at Aden. Ḥasan's sudden entry into the political affairs of the Idrīsī state may be seen as a puzzle, given that he had initially declined when offered the imamate. Ḥasan's takeover may be seen as the work of the Sa'ūdīs at Abhā, as was alleged by 'Alī after he had gone into exile in Aden.<sup>40</sup>

The ongoing internal rivalry in the Idrīsī state, with the

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observers; Baldry, 'Anglo-Italian rivalry in Yemen and 'Asīr', 166-7.

37 Ja'far b. Muḥammad Bakrī b. Ja'far al-Sādiq al-Mirghani was the leader of the Eritrean Khatmiyya. There he enjoyed good relations with the Italians and stayed in close contact with them. For background see O'Fahey, *Arabic Literature of Africa*, I, 208.

38 Baldry, 'Anglo-Italian rivalry in Yemen and 'Asīr', 167.

39 In the course of 1925, Italian representatives continued to put pressure on both 'Alī and Muṣṭafā to gain further advantages in 'Asīr. Italian agents also contacted 'Asīrī tribal shaykhs to persuade the Idrīsīs to conclude peace with the imam; *ibid.*, 168.

40 In Aden, 'Alī explained his views to a representative of the American consulate and stated that the power-shift in 'Asīr was part of the Sa'ūd's plan to annex the Idrīsī territory. Further, 'Alī stated that he would have nothing against such a development as he saw in the Sa'ūd the ruler who could unite the peninsula Arabs; Reissner, 'The Idrīsiden in 'Asīr', 184.

resulting loss of tribal support served to weaken the position of the Idrisī state *vis-à-vis* the other Arab rulers on the peninsula, and consequently its position with the paramount European power in Arabia, Great Britain.

*The power struggle on the Arabian Peninsula*

King Ḥusayn of the Ḥijāz occupied the northern provinces of the Idrisī state shortly after the death of al-Idrisī.<sup>41</sup> From the south, Imam Yaḥyā resumed hostilities and gradually closed in on the major cities on the Red Sea coast.<sup>42</sup> However, the one ruler who was to take over the most territory was Ibn Saʿūd.

In the course of 1925 Ibn Saʿūd consolidated his control over the Ḥijāz and the remnants of the Idrisī territory were now sandwiched between the two expansionist rulers, Ibn Saʿūd and Imam Yaḥyā.<sup>43</sup>

Britain was eager to seek an accommodation with both these rulers, for different reasons. With regard to Ibn Saʿūd, Britain already had an agreement with him, concluded during the war. That, however, was when Ibn Saʿūd was ruler of the obscure territory of Najd. Now his position was quite different and Britain sought to ingratiate herself with the Saʿūdī ruler by sending a series of missions led by Sir Gilhert Clayton. With regard to the imam of Sanʿāʾ, it was necessary for Britain to

41 A. J. Toynbee, *Survey of International Affairs*, 1, 1925, 322.

42 *Ibid.* The imam captured Bāḥil and al-Luḥayya in 1924 and al-Hudayda in April 1925.

43 The growing influence of the Wahhābī *ikhwān*, and their reputation for violent fanaticism, had led to them being banned from performing the pilgrimage to Mecca. In June 1924, when King Ḥusayn proclaimed himself caliph after the Turks had abandoned the caliphate under Atatürk, the *ikhwān* resolved to make the pilgrimage by force, supported by Ibn Saʿūd. The *ikhwān* fell upon al-Ṭāʾif where they murdered the inhabitants and looted the city, and shortly thereafter entered Mecca. Ibn Saʿūd himself entered the city fifteen days later, as a pilgrim. In the course of the following year, the entire Ḥijāz surrendered to Saʿūdī forces, and Ḥusayn was forced into exile in December 1925. Thus, Ibn Saʿūd became sultan of Najd and King of the Ḥijāz; see Holden and Johns, *The House of Saud*, 82-6.

approach him for two reasons. First, there were repeated Yemeni raids into the Aden protectorate. Secondly, Britain was apprehensive of the growing Italian presence in the Yemen, and feared that the imam would conclude an agreement with the Italians. As long as Britain upheld her obligations towards the Idrīsīs in ‘Asīr, it proved difficult for British representatives to gain any advantages with the imam. Also Aden itself was a thorn in the eye of the imam.

In 1925, the imam was in occupation of parts of the Aden protectorate. Negotiations to make the imam withdraw failed and Yemeni positions within the Protectorate were bombed.<sup>44</sup> Not even this measure caused the imam to withdraw, and in January 1926 Sir Gilbert Clayton was dispatched to Ṣan‘ā’ to attempt to conclude a lasting arrangement with the imam.<sup>45</sup> While Clayton was in Ṣan‘ā’, Ḥasan al-Idrīsī, now the new imam of ‘Asīr, appealed to Britain to honour its wartime pledges. The core of the Idrīsī complaint was that the arms promised by the Anglo-Idrīsī treaty had not been forthcoming. The British response to the Idrīsī request was as follows: ‘Unfortunately the Idrisi’s complaint is not without some justification. The danger is that the Idrisi may turn to Italy if we let him down’.<sup>46</sup> Britain could only hope that Clayton’s mission to the imam of Ṣan‘ā’ went well. In that case the danger of Italian influence was reduced and Britain would not have to worry about the Idrīsīs any more, as the Idrīsī territory was bound to be swallowed up by the imam.

In the meantime, Britain tried to find reasons to evade her obligations to the Idrīsīs. Britain claimed that the Anglo-Idrīsī treaty of 1915-17 was no longer valid, as the Sayyid Idrīsī referred to in the treaty (Muḥammad) was now dead. Further, the foreign powers referred to in the treaty—which Britain was to protect the Idrīsī against—were now understood to be *European*

44 Leatherdale, *Britain and Saudi Arabia*, 139.

45 On the Clayton mission to Ṣan‘ā’, see Leatherdale, *ibid.*, 139-41. Eventually, Clayton’s mission failed—no agreement was signed between Britain and the imam. Instead, the imam signed a Treaty of Amity and Commerce with Italy in September 1926; *ibid.*

46 Foreign Office Minute FO E/979/4/91; FO 371/11431; Leatherdale, *ibid.*, 141.



powers, not other Arab rulers. Britain effectively abandoned the Idrīsī state and resolved that 'Britain would adopt a neutral stance in the event of war within Idrisi territory'.<sup>47</sup> This was subsequently explained to Ḥasan al-Idrīsī.

At this point, Britain could no longer afford to endanger her relations with the two rulers who were obviously going to be the future of Arabia, Ibn Saʿūd and Imam Yaḥyā, for the sake of the Idrīsī state. By early 1926, it seemed clear that time was up for the Idrīsī state as independent entity. The question was what was going to happen to the territory. From the British point of view, the worst outcome was that it was annexed by the imam, who was more inclined to favour Italy than Britain. Such an annexation would mean that the Farasān Islands—vital to British shipping—could fall outside British control. As a preparatory measure, Britain began to apply a tougher policy towards Rome and declared that Britain would not tolerate the intrusion of any alien naval power on the Arabian shore of the Red Sea.<sup>48</sup> As it turned out, it was not the imam but Ibn Saʿūd who took over the Idrīsī territory.

### *A Saʿūdī protectorate*

Ḥasan enjoyed Saʿūdī support in his quest to take over the mamate from his nephew, ʿAlī. In December 1925, Ḥasan, whose main stronghold was the area around Abḥā, defeated ʿAlī's troops at Abū ʿArīsh and shortly thereafter he entered Iḥṣān.<sup>49</sup> ʿAlī was forced to flee by ship to the Farasān Islands and later went to Aden. In early 1926, Ḥasan was proclaimed imam of the now rapidly-diminishing Idrīsī state and installed himself at the capital Ṣabyā. The conflict between ʿAlī and Ḥasan further weakened the Idrīsī state.

In late 1925, Aḥmad al-Sharīf al-Sanūsī arrived from the Hijāz to try to mediate between the two contenders for the Idrīsī

<sup>47</sup> FO E/1038/4/91; 371/11431; Leatherdale, *ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> Leatherdale, *ibid.*, 142.

<sup>49</sup> Al-Shahhārī, *al-Muṭāmiʿ al-tawassuʿiyya*, 140.

imamate.<sup>50</sup> However, nothing came out of this attempt, and Ḥasan proceeded to oust ʿAlī by force.

When Ḥasan took over the imamate, the Saʿūdī forces withdrew. Thus Ḥasan was left to fight the ongoing war with the imam alone and also to suppress the increasing tribal rebellions in the Idrīsī territory. The imam of Ṣanʿāʾ at this time already controlled al-Ḥudayda and al-Luḥayya and was advancing northwards into the Idrīsī territory.

By March 1926, Yemeni forces were closing on the main Idrīsī cities of Ṣabyā and Jīzān and in the summer the two cities were actually besieged by the imam.<sup>51</sup> When Ibn Saʿūd finally took over control of the Ḥijāz in 1925, he inherited also the southern areas which the *sharīf* had occupied shortly after the death of Muḥammad al-Idrīsī. Apparently, Ibn Saʿūd extended his occupation to within twenty-five miles of Ṣabyā.<sup>52</sup> This meant that in the summer of 1926 the two rulers, the imam and

50 As described above, Aḥmad al-Sharīf al-Sanūsī took over as leader of the Sanūsīyya upon the death of his uncle, Sayyid Muḥammad al-Mahdī in 1902. Aḥmad al-Sharīf returned the Sanūsī headquarters to Kufra, and led the resistance against the western encroachment in Chad from there. After the Turco-Italian war in 1911-12 it fell upon the Sanūsīyya to continue to lead resistance against the Italian occupation, as the Ottomans were forced to accept a peace treaty in 1912 (the Treaty of Lausanne). In 1916, after a failed attack on British-held Western Egypt, Aḥmad al-Sharīf was forced to relinquish political leadership of the Sanūsīyya to his cousin Muḥammad Idrīs, while remaining spiritual leader. In 1918 he travelled to Turkey where he first resided in Istanbul as a guest of the sultan and later in Anatolia as guest of the Atatürk regime. The Sanūsī resistance against the French, Italian and British had made Aḥmad al-Sharīf famous, and there were suggestions that he should be installed in a renewed caliphate, after Atatürk had abolished the one in Istanbul. For reasons that are unclear, Aḥmad was requested to leave Turkey, and he travelled to the Ḥijāz where he lived until his death in 1944. He enjoyed the personal respect of Ibn Saʿūd and as a token of this the Sanūsīyya was allowed to perform its rites in Wahhābī lands in Ḥijāz. From the Ḥijāz, Aḥmad travelled south to ʿAsīr to assist in the difficulties of the Adārīsa; Ziadeh, *Sanūsīyah*, 68-71 and Evans-Pritchard, *Sanusi*, 132-3.

51 Toynbee, *Survey of International Affairs*, 1925, 322.

52 *Ibid.*, 323.

Ibn Sa'ūd were almost in territorial contact in the central Tihāma.

It became evident that Ḥasan could no longer defend the Idrīsī territory alone, and as the British now had openly declared their unwillingness to support the Idrīsī cause, Ḥasan turned to Ibn Sa'ūd. It seems that Ibn Sa'ūd first expressed unwillingness to support the Idrīsīs against the imam. Toynbee reports that the Sa'ūdī troops in 'Asīr, sent there partly to assist Ḥasan in his quest to overthrow 'Alī and partly to aid Sa'ūdī expansion southwards from the Ḥijāz, withdrew after fighting in February-March 1926. It is unclear if this was because of a definite understanding between the imam and Ibn Sa'ūd or if it was a tactical manoeuvre on the part of Ibn Sa'ūd to press the Idrīsī to give the Sa'ūdīs full control of the Idrīsī territory. If the latter is the case, the tactic was successful. In the autumn of 1926 Ḥasan agreed to place the Idrīsī territory under Sa'ūdī protection and give up responsibility for foreign affairs to Ibn Sa'ūd.

Aḥmad al-Sharīf travelled from 'Asīr to Mecca to conduct negotiations, and a Protectorate Treaty (*mu'āhada ḥāmiya*) was signed on 21 October 1926, known as the Treaty of Mecca.<sup>53</sup> Here we see that the Adārisa again were in contact with the Idrīsī 'network', the informal network of friendship and trust between the descendants of Ibn Idrīs and the descendants of his students, as well as leaders of other Idrīsī-inspired orders. The bond between the Adārisa and the Sanūsiyya remained close, and in this instance Aḥmad al-Sharīf made use of his prestige and his personal standing with Ibn Sa'ūd to bring about the Protectorate Agreement which forestalled annexation by the imam of Ṣan'ā'.<sup>54</sup>

The Adārisa of 'Asīr remained on reasonably friendly terms with the Wahhābī leader Ibn Sa'ūd, despite the well-known Wahhābī aversion against everything related to Sufism. To the Adārisa in 'Asīr, it seemed easier to make peace with the Wahhābīs than the Zaydī imam; the imam was and remained the arch enemy. The relationship between the Idrīsīs and Ibn Sa'ūd had its roots back to the time when Ibn Idrīs had lived in Wahhābī-occupied Mecca in the early nineteenth century and

<sup>53</sup> The Arabic text of the Treaty is reproduced in al-'Aqlī, *Ta'rīkh al-Miḥlaf al-Sulaymānī*, II, 761-2. An English version is given in Hurewicz, *The Middle East*, 382-3.

was—in contrast to other Sufi teachers—treated with respect by the Wāhhābīs and allowed to continue his preaching. We have also seen that Ibn Saʿūd himself held Aḥmad al-Sharīf in high regard and thus continued the tradition of making an exception for Sufi teachers of the Idrīsī tradition in Mecca. As discussed in Chapter One, the teachings of Ibn ʿAbd al-Wāhhāb and Ibn Idrīs were less different than one might expect; the difference lay in the proposed way towards Islamic regeneration. This may have been another reason why Ibn Saʿūd chose to preserve the Idrīsī state as a protectorate (when he in reality simply could have occupied it and chosen to face the imam of Ṣanʿāʾ directly). It may also be the reason why the Adārīsa of ʿAsīr looked to Ibn Saʿūd when the imamate seemed on the verge of total annihilation.

Article One of the Treaty of Mecca defines the Idrīsī territory with the boundaries laid down by Ibn Saʿūd and Muḥammad al-Idrīsī in 1920. (The text refers to the agreement of 10 Ṣafar 1339/24 October 1920. Here we meet again the problem of the dating of the first agreement, which, according to the text is signed 16 Dhū 'l-Hijja 1338/1 September 1920.) In any event, the Treaty of Mecca defined the Idrīsī state as it had been in 1920, including al-Luḥayya, the Farasān Islands, Kamrān Island and the Tihāma as far north as Birk. But, in 1926, the territorial extent of the Idrīsī state had diminished a great deal; the imam had taken large chunks of the southern territories and the *sharīf* (and later Ibn Saʿūd) had taken over districts in the north. In the summer of 1926, the Idrīsī state reached from Taʿshir 10 km north of Maydī in the south, to the territory of the Rijāl al-Māʿ in the north.<sup>54</sup> The border in the interior ran from about halfway inland to Abhā and southwards of Abū ʿArīsh. The total size of the territory was, at the highest estimate, 14,000 square kilometres and the total population did not exceed one and a half million.<sup>55</sup> In other words; the Idrīsī state was in reality much smaller than the entity described in the Treaty of Mecca; the remaining areas were controlled by the imam of Ṣanʿāʾ.

Article Two states that the imam of ʿAsīr may not enter into

54 On the size of the Idrīsī territory, see al-Shahhārī, *al-Muṭāmt' al-tawassuʿiyya*, 144.

55 *Ibid.*

political negotiation with any government or grant any economic concessions except with the sanction of His Majesty the King of Hijāz, sultan of Najd and its Dependencies. The concessions referred to here are oil concessions on the Farasān Islands, which foreign companies had been bidding for since the war.<sup>56</sup> Further, in Article Three, it is stated that the imam of ʿAsīr may not declare war or make peace without Saʿūdī sanction. Neither is the imam permitted to cede any parts of the territory defined in Article One. Articles Five and Six recognize Idrīsī rulership in ʿAsīr and state that internal administration pertaining to tribal affairs, local administration and so on are to be supervised by the Idrīsī government, provided it is kept within the framework of the *sharīʿa*. Finally, in Article Seven, Ibn Saʿūd pledges to defend the territory against aggression.

The treaty was signed by ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz b. Saʿūd and Ḥasan al-Idrīsī in the presence of Aḥmad al-Sharīf al-Sanūsī and meant the end of Idrīsī independence on the Arabian Peninsula. The Idrīsī state was now a Saʿūdī protectorate, much in the same way as the Trucial States were British Protectorates.

From the British point of view, the Treaty of Mecca was very satisfactory. Since the imam of Ṣanʿāʾ had signed a treaty of amity and commerce with Italy, Britain now feared that the imam would take over parts of Idrīsī territory and in particular the islands of Farasān and Kamrān. The Treaty of Mecca meant that these islands would now be defended by Britain's friend, Ibn Saʿūd. In addition the protectorate treaty relieved Britain of its obligations *vis-à-vis* the Idrīsīs. The Treaty of Mecca was so beneficial to British interests, that one may speculate if a British hand was involved in the conclusion of this treaty.<sup>57</sup> There is however, no direct evidence of this.

<sup>56</sup> Ḥasan al-Idrīsī awarded the oil concession on Farasān to the Shell Group in September 1926. This may be seen as a last gesture to the British, to try to obtain British support against the imam of Ṣanʿāʾ. However, the oil wells at Farasān were eventually abandoned as dry; see Baldry, 'The Power and Mineral Concessions', 51-65.

<sup>57</sup> '... the Treaty of Mecca hindered (Italian) aspirations in the Red Sea, and it was viewed as a success for Britain, even though she had no part to play in it'; Leatherdale, *Britain and Saudi Arabia*, 143, referring to FO minute of 10 January 1927; FO E/135/22/91: 371/12235.

The Treaty of Mecca served, if not to stabilize the situation in southwest Arabia, at least to clarify it. There were now two rulers—Ibn Sa<sup>ʿ</sup>ūd and Imam Yaḥyā—who had tied themselves to two European powers, Britain and Italy. The Idrīsī territory had been a separate entity in the middle, but now the imam would have to fight Ibn Sa<sup>ʿ</sup>ūd to achieve his aspirations of a 'greater Yemen'. With Italian help, he aspired to gain control of the Tihāma, in other words Idrīsī territory. Thus, the political situation had boiled down to two sets of antagonists who would have to settle their differences on the Arabian Peninsula. In this perspective, the Idrīsī state had become the bone to fight over and was no longer an active participant.

### *A Sa<sup>ʿ</sup>ūdī province*

The promulgation of the Treaty of Mecca had created a typically colonial situation in Southwest Arabia; two European powers with one client each. This meant that Anglo-Italian relations became more difficult than ever, and a clarification was attempted in the course of a series of meetings in Rome, resulting in what is known as 'The Rome Agreement'. Neither of the two parties was to intervene in the ongoing dispute between the imam and Ibn Sa<sup>ʿ</sup>ūd. The Rome Agreement was signed in early March 1927, almost at the same time as Sa<sup>ʿ</sup>ūdī-Yemenī talks got on the way in Ṣan<sup>ʿ</sup>ā'. The two Arab rulers would now be left in peace to measure out their respective pieces of the former Idrīsī state.

However, it seems that southwest Arabia was not left completely without European interference. It appears that Italy (despite the Rome Agreement) started a propaganda campaign in <sup>ʿ</sup>Asīr. Italy now tried to persuade Ḥasan al-Idrīsī to break his treaty with Ibn Sa<sup>ʿ</sup>ūd and enter into a similar agreement with Italy's friend, the imam of Ṣan<sup>ʿ</sup>ā'.<sup>58</sup> The Italians also offered the Idrīsī financial compensation if he would cancel the Shell oil concession on the Farasān Islands.<sup>59</sup> Britain could not respond

58 Leatherdale, *ibid*, 144, referring to Aden correspondence of 6 July 1927; CO/48004/54/27: 725/11.

59 Baldry, 'The Power and Mineral Concessions', 92-3.

to these provocations without breaking the Rome Agreement herself and thus let matters lie.

In Ṣanʿāʾ a Saʿūdī-Yemeni war was averted for the time being. Thus, the Idrīsī territory was administered as a Saʿūdī protectorate. A Saʿūdī governor (*mandūb*) administered the territory,<sup>60</sup> while Ḥasan al-Idrīsī was in charge of internal affairs. In the following years the situation in ʿAsīr was relatively calm and the new administrative system prevailed. There were some tribal uprisings against the Saʿūdī governor, but this only led to the old governor being exchanged for a new one.

In November 1930, Ibn Saʿūd announced the annexation of ʿAsīr. Thus, the Idrīsī territory became a Saʿūdī province alongside Najd and the Ḥijāz, and Ḥasan al-Idrīsī's position was reduced to a nominal head of the province. Apparently, Ibn Saʿūd wanted to control the fertile agricultural land of ʿAsīr as well as the ports near the (disputed) border to the Yemen. Ibn Saʿūd could also draw on the argument that his purpose was to protect the Sunni population of ʿAsīr against the Zaydis of the Yemen.

Apparently, the Saʿūdī annexation came about after a telegram from Ḥasan to Ibn Saʿūd, in which Ḥasan renounced his authority over internal (financial) affairs to Ibn Saʿūd.<sup>61</sup> It is unclear if this telegram was sent on Ḥasan's own initiative or if it was a response to an ultimatum from Ibn Saʿūd. Saʿūdī writers, such as al-ʿAqīlī, have tended to view the annexation as a response to Ḥasan's appeal for help, in so far as he was no longer able to administer the territory. From another perspective, the Saʿūdī annexation of the Idrīsī territory can be understood as a manoeuvre to strengthen Saʿūdī claims to the territory *vis-à-vis* Imām Yaḥyā who repeatedly claimed parts of the Idrīsī territory for himself. Thus, in this view the telegram sent by Ḥasan is a

<sup>60</sup> The first Saʿūdī governor was Ṣāliḥ ibn ʿAbd al-Wāḥid who arrived in the latter half of 1927 (1347). Concerning the governing of the Idrīsī territory as a Saʿūdī protectorate, see al-ʿAqīlī, *Taʾrīkh al-Mikhlaḥ al-Sulaymānī*, II, 904.

<sup>61</sup> The text of this telegram can be found in Khayr al-Dīn al-Zirkilī, *Shiḥh al-jazīra fī ʿahd al-malik ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz*, Beirut 1977, 536; Reissner, 'Die Idrīsiden in ʿAsīr', 186.

response to a Sa<sup>c</sup>ūdī ultimatum.

As a Sa<sup>c</sup>ūdī province, the administration of the Idrīsī territory of <sup>c</sup>Asīr was taken over by the Sa<sup>c</sup>ūdīs. This time also internal administration and finances was to be controlled by Sa<sup>c</sup>ūdī-appointed governors. A local council (*majlis al-shūrā*) was established, headed by a Sa<sup>c</sup>ūdī representative.<sup>62</sup> <sup>c</sup>Asīrī representatives in the council were for the most part the same people who had served as ministers in the Idrīsī government, amongst them Muḥammad al-Amīn al-Shinqīṭī and Muḥammad Yaḥyā al-Bāṣuhī.<sup>63</sup> The Sa<sup>c</sup>ūdī annexation of the Idrīsī territory in <sup>c</sup>Asīr meant the definite end of the Idrīsī state as independent or semi-independent entity on the Arabian Peninsula. The Adārisa of <sup>c</sup>Asīr was no longer a political power factor, as the new order was settled. However, the Idrīsī movement which had started as a resistance movement against the Ottomans, rose in one final rebellion, this time against Ibn Sa<sup>c</sup>ūd.

### *1932: The final Idrīsī revolt*

After the Hashemites had been exiled from the Ḥijāz, they led campaigns to gather support for a scheme to liberate the Holy Cities from the Wahhābīs.<sup>64</sup> There were many potential supporters of such a case, from the Shī<sup>c</sup>a leaders of Iran to Indian Muslims who were suspicious of the Wahhābīs as keepers of the Haramayn. A conference was held in Amman, in which anti-Wahhābī leaders agreed to organize and finance a rebellion against Sa<sup>c</sup>ūdī rule in the Ḥijāz. The rebellion was to be led by Ibn Rafāda, a pro-Hashemite shaykh of the tribes in the northern

62 Al-Shahhārī, *al-Muṭāmi<sup>c</sup> al-tawassu<sup>c</sup>iyya*, 161.

63 Al-<sup>c</sup>Aqīlī, *Ta<sup>c</sup>rikh al-Mikhlāf al-Sulaymānī*, II, 903-4.

64 The final Idrīsī revolt in 1932 and the unrest connected to the subsequent settlement between Ibn Sa<sup>c</sup>ūd and Imam Yaḥyā in 1934 was commented upon in a series of reports by the British Commissioner at Port Sudan. These reports were sent to the British administration in Khartoum, and are presently in the National Records Office in Khartoum. The serial numbers of these documents are: Port Sudan, 2/35/211. I am grateful to Dr <sup>c</sup>Alī Ṣāliḥ Karrār for locating and copying these documents and to Dr Fadwa <sup>c</sup>Abd al-Raḥmān Ṭāhā for bringing them to Bergen.



Ḥijāz and arms and ammunition were to be purchased from British representatives in Egypt.<sup>65</sup>

However, when the revolt broke out in the Ḥijāz in the summer of 1932, Ibn Saʿūd had already learnt about the conspiracy, and the uprising was crushed. Some of the surviving rebels sought refuge in the Yemen, and supporters of Ibn Rafāda was in contact with the Idrīsī family in ʿAsīr, spreading the message of rebellion against the Saʿūdī rulers, and pledging to support an ʿAsīrī uprising. In his report, the British Commissioner in Port Sudan also indicates that the Imam Yaḥyā extended sympathy and assistance to the plans for a revolt in ʿAsīr.<sup>66</sup>

In November 1932, rebellion broke out in ʿAsīr.<sup>67</sup> It seems that one of the driving forces behind this uprising was ʿAbd al-Wahhāb b. Muḥammad al-Idrīsī, the second son of Muḥammad al-Idrīsī, now around 18-20 years of age.<sup>68</sup> It was ʿAbd al-Wahhāb who organized and led the tribal warriors in the uprising, determined to restore Idrīsī rule in the Tihāma. On the other hand, the formal head of the Idrīsī family, Ḥasan, seems to have favoured continuing Saʿūdī rule. Ḥasan himself led an expedition to arrest the Saʿūdī governor in Jīzān, but thereafter telegraphed Ibn Saʿūd to assure him of his continued loyalty.

In the course of November 1932, reinforcements was sent from Riyāḍ to ʿAsīr and Saʿūdī forces soon regained control of Jīzān. In March 1933, Ṣabyā was again under Saʿūdī control and Ḥasan, who resided in the city, was forced to take refuge in the Yemen.<sup>69</sup> From the Yemen, Ḥasan demanded that the Saʿūdī annexation of 1930 be annulled, a demand obviously unacceptable to Ibn Saʿūd. In the end, Ḥasan was allowed to stay in the Yemen on a Saʿūdī pension, but later he went to live in Mecca. ʿAbd al-Wahhāb was also granted a Saʿūdī pension and he later joined his uncle in Mecca. ʿAlī al-Idrīsī, who had no part in the

65 On the events leading up to the Idrīsī revolt in 1932, see al-Shahhārī, *al-Muṭāmiʿ al-tawassuʿiyya*, 169-74.

66 Port Sudan, 2/35/211, 'Penzance-No 0/50 of 30th March 1934'.

67 According to al-Shahhārī, the ʿAsīrī uprising started in Ṣabyā on 5 Rajab 1351/4 November 1932; *al-Muṭāmiʿ al-tawassuʿiyya*, 171.

68 Al-Shahhārī, *ibid.*, 174. See also Reissner, 'Die Idrīsiden in ʿAsīr', 188-9.

69 Port Sudan, 2/35/211, 'Penzance-No 0/50 of 30th March 1934'.

1932 uprisings, spent his remaining days in Riyāḍ. By mid-1933, the Idrīsī family no longer had any political influence in ʿAsīr. The territory itself remained a Saʿūdī province, but this time without any recognition of a nominal Idrīsī front figure, neither on the political nor the religious level. Since the death of Muḥammad al-Idrīsī in 1923, the Idrīsī state had been in a process of gradual disintegration. In 1933, ʿAsīr was finally fully incorporated into the modern Saʿūdī state.

*Differences settled: The end of the Idrīsī state*

With the Adārīsa of ʿAsīr removed from a political role in Arabia, it was clear that there would have to be a settlement between Ibn Saʿūd and Imam Yaḥyā over the disputed regions of the Mikhlāf al-Sulaymānī. In the course of 1933, there were several attempts to settle the borders, but with no success. By March 1934, the negotiations had stalled completely.<sup>70</sup> Eventually, in April 1934, Saʿūdī troops invaded the town of Najrān in the interior and al-Ḥudayda on the Red Sea coast.<sup>71</sup> The display of Saʿūdī military superiority caused the imam to agree to discuss a border settlement on Saʿūdī conditions. The Treaty of al-Ṭāʾif of May 1934 settled most of the border disputes between the two states. The border was drawn just north of Maydī, so that the heartland of the former Idrīsī territory fell to Saʿūdī Arabia. The southern part of the territory, including al-Luḥayya and al-Ḥudayda fell to the Yemen. The eastern border between Saʿūdī Arabia and the Yemen was not demarcated, and has remained undemarcated until today.<sup>72</sup>

70 *Ibid.*

71 *Ibid.*

72 Dresch, *Tribes, government and History in Yemen*, 3. The later family history of the ʿAsīrī branch of the Adārīsa is discussed by Ṣāliḥ b. Muḥammad al-Jaʿfārī, *Aʿtār azhār aghsān ḥazīrat al-taqdīs fi karāmāt ... al-sayyid Aḥmad b. Idrīs*, Cairo 1394/1974, 43-4.

## CONCLUSION

In the introduction, we introduced three categories of factors which can be seen as having contributed to the rise and fall of the Idrīsī state; political, religious and factors pertaining to personal or family prestige.

### *Political factors in the history of the Idrīsī state*

The development of an Idrīsī state in ʿAsīr was linked to the prevailing political conditions in ʿAsīr and to the wider political climate. The gradual downfall of the Idrīsīs in ʿAsīr can for a large part be attributed to political factors.

The rise of Muḥammad al-Idrīsī to political leadership in Tihāmat ʿAsīr was facilitated by the political situation in the region. The arrival of the Turks in the nineteenth century had disrupted the old system under which the tribal leaders gave their allegiance to two different rulers, the *sharīf* of Abū ʿArīsh (in the Tihāma) or to the *amīr* of ʿAsīr al-Sarāh (the Banū Mughayd in the highlands). The introduction of direct Turkish rule meant that these two leaders were subordinated. However, Turkish rule was never fully effective in ʿAsīr, with the result that the region became a power vacuum. Tribal unrest and dissatisfaction had no focal point and scattered uprisings were common in ʿAsīr. Thus, when Muḥammad al-Idrīsī set himself forth as leader, he did not have any competition; he did not have to contend with an already-established ruler. Instead, he became the focal point which was needed to transform widespread dissatisfaction with Turkish rule into a coherent resistance movement (Imam Yaḥyā in Ṣanʿāʾ became the other focus). Anti-Ottoman sentiments among the indigenous population provided a sufficient basis for unification. The ʿAsīrī-Yemeni dissatisfaction with Turkish rule was

again linked to two ongoing processes within the Ottoman Empire; the modernisation of legislative and bureaucratic procedures and the economic decline which made it impossible for the Sublime Porte to back its modernisation schemes with economic rewards.

As the scattered rebellions in ʿAsīr gradually coalesced into a unified resistance force under Idrīsī leadership, the Ottoman governors were quick to realize what was about to happen. In the summer of 1909, rebel forces captured al-Muḥāʾil and also threatened the coastal cities, and the Ottomans requested the reinforcement of Saʿīd Pasha and his army. Significantly, Saʿīd Pasha chose to contact al-Idrīsī directly, and sent Shaykh Tawfīq al-Arnāwuṭī to establish such contact. This meant that the Ottomans recognised the Idrīsī leadership behind the rebellion and entered into an agreement with Muḥammad al-Idrīsī (an agreement which al-Idrīsī later was to claim that the Turks broke).

Once al-Idrīsī was recognised by the Ottomans as the real power in ʿAsīr, he became an interesting figure to European agents and observers in search of a 'back door' into Ottoman Arabia. Significantly, the main European power on the peninsula, Great Britain, did not give any support to the Idrīsī cause before the outbreak of the World War (this is, of course, linked to the British policy to maintain the Ottoman Empire as long as possible to prevent other powers from gaining influence in the region). Instead it was Italy who first grasped the possibility of the ʿAsīrī rebels as potential allies. Italy brought the Turco-Italian war to the Yemen to challenge British hegemony on the peninsula and create an outlet for its own colony in Eritrea. Thus, the fact that Italy established contact with al-Idrīsī can be seen as a reflection of European power politics.

The Turco-Italian war presented the Idrīsī rebellion with a first step towards securing its embryonic state. By the conclusion of the Italian-Idrīsī alliance, the Idrīsī leader had achieved two things; first he had asserted independence of Istanbul. Secondly, Idrīsī rule in ʿAsīr was recognised by an outside power. (A third result not to be underestimated was the regular flow of arms into ʿAsīr.)

The same line of argument hold true for the Anglo-Idrīsī alliance during the First World War. It was considerations related to the war which brought Britain to finally seek allies among the Arabs. It was the Anglo-Idrīsī treaty which eventually secured the existence of the Idrīsī state, but that existence was ultimately linked to the imperial policy of the British Foreign Office and the priorities of the War Cabinet in London. Thus, the Idrīsī state was created and upheld by local and international political conditions in the time of the First World War. The Ottoman Empire could not, and the British Foreign office would not, put an end to this entity which arose out of the ʿAsīrī tribal rebellions.

Turning to the post-war period, the downfall of the Idrīsīs in ʿAsīr was caused by the changed political climate. With the Ottoman Empire defeated and dismembered, the common enemy that had been had been a prime factor in the unification of the ʿAsīrī tribes was gone. For the Idrīsīs in ʿAsīr the time had now come to consolidate their position as rulers in the land. This was to prove more difficult now that the Idrīsī movement could no longer direct its efforts and energies against one single group. Instead the Idrīsī state was engaged in a complex rivalry with other Arab rulers, the imam of Ṣanʿāʾ, the *sharīf* of Mecca and Ibn Saʿūd. The system of tribal allegiance within ʿAsīr could not withstand the radical change in circumstances that the disappearance of the Turks represented. With the former overlords gone, the way was now open for other Arab rulers to compete for influence among the tribal leaders of ʿAsīr. The Idrīsī territory, sandwiched as it was between three ambitious Arab rulers, was subject to expansionist schemes which gradually undermined the confederation of tribes which had developed in the pre-war years.

If we examine the post-war events from this point of view, the first breach in ʿAsīrī unity came about with the Saʿūdī-Idrīsī treaty of 1920. As the highland tribes reacted against the Āl ʿĀ'id they turned to Ibn Saʿūd, not to Muḥammad al-Idrīsī. The reason for this was the long-standing Wahhābī influence in ʿAsīr al-Sarāh, deriving from the first Wahhābī expansion in the early nineteenth century. Thus, we see that the tribes that had formerly been loyal to al-Idrīsī now turned to another ruler, who was only

too pleased to gain influence. One may even say that the shaykhs of ʿAsīr al-Sarāh now turned to the ruler who *really* represented their religious and ideological standing—the need for a unified struggle being gone.

The death of Muḥammad al-Idrīsī was the next event which led to a breach in ʿAsīrī unity; the effect of his forceful personality as unifying factor should not be underestimated. The ensuing rivalry between ʿAlī and Muṣṭafā led to division among the tribal shaykhs—which again weakened the Idrīsīs' position and further opened the door to (especially) Saʿūdī influence. There are some reports that tribal leaders broke off their relation with the Idrīsīs in protest against ʿAlī's feeble handling of the Italian intrigues in the country.<sup>1</sup> Some turned to the Saʿūdī ruler, others to the *sharīf* of Mecca, at that time still in power.

Thus, at the time Muḥammad al-Idrīsī died, the conditions which had led to the establishment of an Idrīsī state had changed so drastically that there in reality no longer existed any unifying factor among the tribes of ʿAsīr. The Ottoman enemy was gone, and so was the charismatic leader of the anti-Ottoman campaign. All that was left was petty rivalry within the Idrīsī family and Italian attempts at intrigue. Consequently, the remains of the Idrīsī state were too feeble to stand up against determined expansionists like Ibn Saʿūd and Imam Yaḥyā.

Why did the Idrīsī movement keep losing tribal support after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, while leaders like Ibn Saʿūd and Imam Yaḥyā seemingly had a strong grip on their people? To answer this question, it is necessary to point out some fundamental differences between the Idrīsīs in ʿAsīr and the Saʿūdīs of Najd or the imam of the Yemen. Both Ibn Saʿūd and the imam ruled over a relatively homogenous population,<sup>2</sup> adhering to a

1 Baldry states that the Quḥrā tribe terminated their relations with the Idrīsīs when young ʿAlī agreed to open an Italian consulate in al-Hudayda; 'Anglo-Italian rivalry', 167, based on PRO doc L/PS/10/1109.

2 For Ibn Saʿūd this was true before the *ikhwān* conquests brought new regions under Saʿūdī control. For the imam, this was true during the wartime years, when his rule was confined to the Yemeni mountains. Once his territory expanded to include the population of the coastal cities, a much more diverse population came under his rule (11).

specific and clearly-defined religious system (Wahhābism and Zaydī Shī'ism, respectively). The loyalty they extracted from the population was not *ad hoc*, not just based on the urge to throw off Turkish overlordship. The imam based his claim to power on the centuries-old dynasty of Zaydī imams. Ibn Sa'ūd could also draw upon an historic legacy, namely to restore the first Wahhābī state of the nineteenth century.

The case of the Idrīsīs in 'Asīr was different. Firstly, the population in 'Asīr was anything but homogenous. Many of the mountain tribes who joined the Idrīsī cause were sympathetic to the Wahhābī call, while in the coastal cities numerous other religious allegiances could be found. Secondly, the Idrīsīs in 'Asīr did not really have any tribal roots in the region; they were and remained newcomers.<sup>3</sup> Thus, the Adārīsa of 'Asīr could not draw upon any long-standing basis for their cause, comparable to what the Hāshid and Bakīl were to the imam or the *ikhwān* to Ibn Sa'ūd. The allegiance which Muḥammad al-Idrīsī extracted from tribal leaders in the pre-war years was, to a much greater extent, a result of the specific social and political circumstances prevailing at the time. Tribal allegiances faltered as soon as the circumstances changed and the Idrīsī state became a losing horse in the Arab rivalry that was played out in the first decade after the First World War.

This again was to lead to the Idrīsīs losing support from their most important patron, Great Britain. The Anglo-Idrīsī treaty concluded during the war was determined by Britain's overriding need to gain allies against its wartime enemy, the Ottoman Empire. However, the Anglo-Idrīsī treaty of 1915 contains phrases in which the British authorities undertook to

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problem has prevailed in the Yemen throughout this century and has become more evident today. See also discussion about the differences between highland and lowland population in Chapter Four. As it has been noted, the Adārīsa of 'Asīr never developed the lasting hierarchic structure of tribal allegiance created by the Sanūsiyya in Cyrenaica. The Adārīsa, evidently, did not 'go native'; for example there is little evidence that they married locally (see Vikør, *Sufī and Scholar*, 195). Again, this can be explained by the differences in social and political realities but also by differences in the personalities of the leaders; see discussion in Chapter Three.

safeguard the Idrīsī territory against attack from 'any enemy who may molest him' and 'guarantee his independence in his own domains'.<sup>4</sup> After the war, these phrases were interpreted to mean that Britain would support the Idrīsīs against their rivals, which meant most prominently the imam. During the first post-war years Britain did provide the Idrīsī state with arms and financial support.

However, as the political picture changed, so did Britain's willingness to honour wartime promises. Italian activity in the Yemen after 1923 was a cause for deep concern to British observers, as they feared a pro-Italian imam bordering on the Aden protectorate. Likewise, they feared the imam would gain control of the islands in the Red Sea, vital to British naval interests. It therefore became necessary for Britain to obtain some sort of agreement with the imam, but as long as Britain remained loyal to the Anglo-Idrīsī treaty this would be difficult. Britain thus effectively abandoned her former ally for the sake of larger imperial interests.

This was to prove decisive for the future of the Idrīsī family as rulers of ʿAsīr. The alliance with Britain was one of the major factors which transformed the ʿAsīrī rebellions into a state, as the treaty recognised and secured Idrīsī independence (Chapter Four). Now, as this vital support was withdrawn, Ḥasan al-Idrīsī had little choice but to put his remaining territory under Saʿūdī protection, as the imam advanced from the south. One may speculate what would have happened if Britain had continued to support the Idrīsīs. It is possible that this small state may have survived as a mini-emirate on the Red Sea coast, comparable to the small entities on the Gulf shore which enjoyed continuous British support.

### *The ideological foundation of the Idrīsī state: Religion and statehood*

To say that the Idrīsī state arose out of a particular set of political

4 'Anglo-Idrīsī Treaty of Friendship and Goodwill', reproduced in Aitchison, *A collection of Treaties*, 177.



circumstances is only part of the answer. For a new state to solidify its existence, it needs to prove that it is ideologically legitimate; in fact that it is more so than the previous system.

For a study of the ideological foundations of the Idrisī state, it is natural to turn to the writings of Muḥammad al-Idrisī, expressed in the *Bayān*. Although this document is undoubtedly a piece of rhetoric, meant to justify events that have already taken place, it still provides insights into the thinking of Muḥammad al-Idrisī.

A major theme of the *Bayān* is the allegation that the Turks are unable to govern in 'Asīr, because of their general incompetence, but also because they refuse to rule according to Islam and God's commandments. Here, says al-Idrisī, lies the difference between Ottoman rule and the Idrisī state;

What does the fair-minded man understand from all this, except that we always work for peace, while the state officials always work to eliminate the state's foundations. We work for reform, while those devious ones work to undermine it. We work for the implementation of the pure *sharī'a*, and they work to abolish it and eliminate all traces of it.

However rhetorical such phrases are, they reflect a clear will to justify political activism in religious terms. In this regard al-Idrisī takes a radical step away from the 'medieval synthesis'<sup>5</sup> and his wording is repeated by present day fundamentalist movements in the Muslim world. If the ruler does not rule according to Islam, he must be overthrown and a new order be set up. That this was not only rhetoric is shown by the reports from later visitors to the Idrisī state (Rihani and Forbes), describing a puritanical enforcement of a strictly Islamic way of life.

In this regard it is natural to compare the activities of al-Idrisī with those of Aḥmad al-Sharīf, leading the Sanūsiyya resistance against Europeans in Libya, to investigate if this religious justification of political activism is in any way typical of the Idrisī tradition. When Italy invaded Libya in October 1911, the Sanūsiyya co-operated with the Ottomans against the invaders. When the Ottomans were forced to sign the Treaty of Lausanne

<sup>5</sup> See discussion in Chapter One.

in 1912, the Sanūsiyya continued to resist alone. The Italian aggression was interpreted by the Sanūsiyya in terms of *jihād*, and in January 1912, Aḥmad al-Sharīf published a call for *jihād* in an Egyptian magazine (only a few months before al-Idrīsī published his *Bayān*, also in Egypt).<sup>6</sup>

There are similarities between the two proclamations, in so far as they both urge believers to resist un-Islamic rule and strive to preserve a just Islamic state-system; in other words they encourage political activism. However, there are fundamental differences. Firstly, al-Idrīsī does not use the term *jihād* at all. Secondly, his proclamation is directed against the Ottomans, themselves Muslims. Thirdly, the Sanūsiyya fought to maintain a social order which had already been established in Cyrenaica during the last half of the nineteenth century. Al-Idrīsī fought to establish a *new* social order which had not been there before.

Based on this comparison, we may draw two conclusions. Firstly, al-Idrīsī's activities in 'Asīr were clearly more *activist* than the Sanūsiyya, in so far as the Sanūsiyya resistance can be seen as a reaction, a struggle to preserve, while the Idrīsī movement was aimed at establishing something new.<sup>7</sup> Secondly, al-Idrīsī's activism went much further than that of the Sanūsiyya, as he denounces the Muslim Turks instead of infidel Europeans. Based on this, we may say that al-Idrīsī operated quite outside the strictly Sufi paradigm of the Sanūsiyya, which only turned activist when the order itself was threatened.

Another, and more modern, argument which is indicated in

6 On the activities of Aḥmad al-Sharīf, see Chapter Five. For a discussion of Aḥmad al-Sharīf's call for *jihād*, see Rudolph Peters, *Islam and colonialism*, The Hague 1979, 86-9, and Knut S. Vikør, 'A Sanūsī treatise on *jihād*', *Proceedings of the Brismes Conference, London, 10-12 July 1991*, London 1991, 509-20.

7 It can be argued that the Idrīsī rebellion also was reactive in nature, that is was a response to Turkish oppression and misrule. In the *Bayān*, al-Idrīsī projects the image that his movement was one of 'defence': 'I think every aware Muslim, who wishes well for Islam and for the Muslims, will say that it is our duty to make preparations for defence and not to subject ourselves to jeopardy'. This, however, must be regarded as retrospective justification. Al-Idrīsī's movement was activist almost from the start—it quickly went beyond merely resisting the Ottoman governors.

the *Bayān* is that the Turks are unfit to rule in ʿAsīr because they are Turks and not Arabs—that a just Islamic society can only be regenerated through Arab rule. Statements about the Arabs' supremacy over the Turks abound in the *Bayān*, 'They [the Turks] show contempt for the Arab Nation and the Arab language' and 'I, however, think that the other states are fully aware that the Arabs are the strongest people in their religion (in particular the Yemeni Arabs)'. Such statements are echoes of Rashīd Riḍā and ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Kawākibī in *Umm al-Qurā*. It is most likely that these were ideas which al-Idrīsī encountered in Cairo and which now are used as justification of a rebellion which was already well on the way to becoming a state.

What justified the establishment of a separate Idrīsī state in ʿAsīr? Its legitimacy was based on two related arguments which both were influential ideas in the early twentieth century; the idea of moral regeneration through a return to proper Islamic rule and the implication that this would come about through Arab supremacy.

However, these arguments were set forth only after the Idrīsī movement was well on the way to becoming a state. These ideas did not *create* the Idrīsī state, rather they provided legitimacy to a militant movement struggling to overcome Turkish rule in ʿAsīr.

### *Personal prestige and tribal allegiance*

Having discussed the political factors which shaped the history of the Idrīsī state and the ideas which justified its existence, we turn now to the last point: Why *Idrīsī* leadership in ʿAsīr? Why was it not a leader from the local population, like the powerful Banū Mughayd or Rijāl al-Māʿ, who led the rebellion against Ottoman rule? To answer this question it is necessary to turn to the person behind the Idrīsī state and examine the nature of the relation between Muḥammad al-Idrīsī and the local tribal leaders.

Muḥammad al-Idrīsī was descendant of a venerated Sufi shaykh whose tomb was in ʿAsīr and whose name was renowned in large parts of the Muslim world. He was also descended from an acknowledged *ashrāf* family, whose reputation was one

of piety and undisputed nobility. His father and grandfather had lived quietly in ʿAsīr—if they had done little to gain influence, they had also done little to gain hostility and unpopularity. Rather, Muḥammad al-Quṭb and ʿAlī preserved the prestige of the Adārisa during the turbulent times of the nineteenth century.

Al-Idrīsī himself was a learned *ʿālim* with *ijāzas* from al-Azhar, a Sufi and a scholar, and part of the Idrīsī 'network'. He was also, by all accounts, a man of extraordinary charisma and personal stature. To the tribal population of the Tihāma, Muḥammad al-Idrīsī's leadership gave legitimacy to their uprising against the Ottomans. The population had grown increasingly dissatisfied under Turkish rule, due to heavy taxes and misrule, but due to the power vacuum created by the coming of the Turks, a unified rebellion was not yet possible.

The primary objective of tribes like the Rijāl al-Māʿ was simply to get rid of the Ottomans. In this regard, the prestige of a man like Muḥammad al-Idrīsī, coupled with the religious justification his scholarly background enabled him to use, provided proper legitimacy from the tribal point of view. In this respect, al-Idrīsī's movement in ʿAsīr is not unlike that of ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Jazāʾirī in nineteenth-century Algeria.<sup>8</sup>

On these grounds, tribal leaders gave their allegiance to Muḥammad al-Idrīsī. We may speculate which came first—Idrīsī activities to gain a popular base for his movement or tribal dissatisfaction in need of a legitimate cause for which to start an organized rebellion. Most likely, the first years of the Idrīsī movement in ʿAsīr was characterised by an interplay between the two sides—the people who provided the leader with a popular base, and the leader who provided the people with a just cause.

### Conclusion

The Idrīsī state arose out of the power vacuum created by the

8 ʿAbd al-Qādir's leadership authority came to a large extent from his, and his father's positions in the order (the father was the head of the Qādiriyya). ʿAbd al-Qādir led resistance against the French and established an independent state which in 1837-39 covered two-thirds of Algeria.

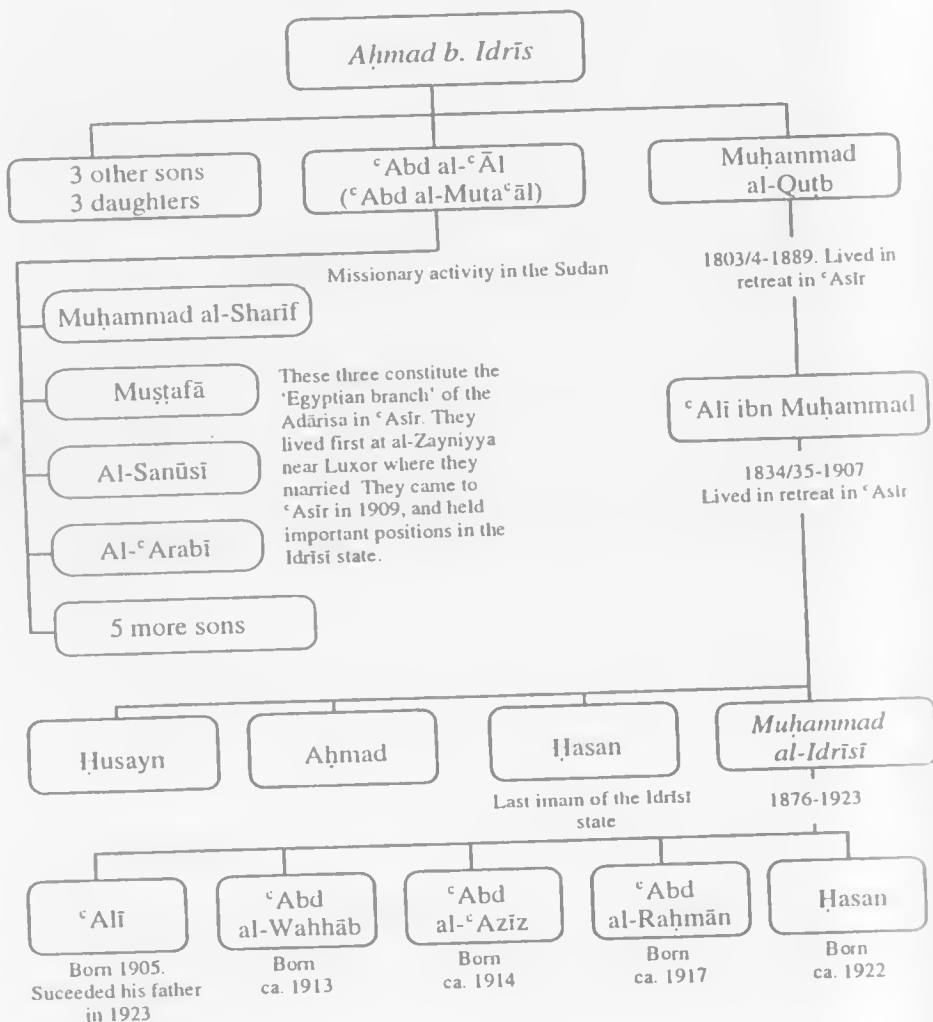
Ottoman occupation in the nineteenth century, combined with the religious prestige of Muḥammad al-Idrīsī, which made his rise to leadership possible. As the rebellion proved successful, the movement developed into a state, which was justified in terms of religious righteousness coupled with vague ideas of Arab supremacy on religious grounds. Thus, the early history of the Idrīsī state is marked by the interplay of three different factors which made the rise of the state possible; political, religious and factors pertaining to personal prestige. The years leading up to the First World War consolidated the Idrīsī state through confrontation with the Ottomans. In these confrontations, Idrīsī independence was secured by treaties with outside powers, Italy and Britain respectively, who both had their own reasons to oppose the Ottomans. Thus, in this phase, Great Power politics decisively transformed the ʿAsīrī rebellions into statehood.

After 1918, the combination of factors which had caused the rise of the Idrīsī state ceased to exist. The political element is clear; with Idrīsī weakness, British support was no longer forthcoming in the Arab rivalry which followed the war. The need for a prestigious legitimacy of tribal rebellion, or for religious justification of Idrīsī leadership, was also gone when the Turks disappeared. Lacking a popular base, a just cause, a charismatic leader and British support, the Adārīsa lost political leadership in ʿAsīr and the Idrīsī state was incorporated into modern Saudi Arabia.

# APPENDIXES

## A

### THE IDRĪSĪ GENEALOGY



## B

### *BAYĀN LI'L-NĀS WA-HUDĀ WA-MAW'ĪZA LI'L-MUTTAQĪN*

*by Muḥammad al-Idrīsī*

The *Bayān* was published by Muḥammad al-Idrīsī in Cairo in 1912, while the Turco-Italian war was still being fought in the Yemen. The document is in the form of a letter to an unnamed friend in Egypt. The printed version, which is used for the present translation, has an appendix, which is not translated here, in the form of a statement by an anonymous Ottoman official supporting al-Idrīsī's arguments.

The *Bayān* is the one piece of al-Idrīsī's writings which most clearly relates to the political situation in 'Asīr. There are several references in the *Bayān* to the events taking place between 1907 and 1912. It also provides an interesting insight into the thinking—and rhetorical style—of the founder of the Idrīsī state.

For help and guidance in translating this treatise, I am grateful to Professor John O. Hunwick, Northwestern University.<sup>1</sup>

هذا بيان للناس وهدى وموعظة للمتقين

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

« الحمد لله الذي أنزل على عبده الكتاب ولم يجعل له عوجاً قيماً  
لينذر بأساً شديداً من لدنه ويبشر المؤمنين الذين يعملون  
الصالحات ان لهم أجراً حسناً ما كثين فيه أبداً »

<sup>1</sup> The translation only is also published in *New Arabian Studies*, 4, 1997, forthc.

الصلاة والسلام على سيدنا محمد بن عبد الله الصادق الأمين الذي اصطفاه الله من خيرة العرب فأرسله الى الناس كافة بالحق بشيراً ونذيراً وداعياً الى الله باذنه وسراجاً منيراً وأنزل عليه في محكم كتابه العزيز: « كنتم خير أمة أخرجت للناس تأمرون بالمعروف وتنهون عن المنكر وتؤمنون بالله ».

وأبان له من أحوال الأمم السابقة ما فيه مزدجر لقوم يعقلون فقال: « لعن الذين كفروا من بني إسرائيل على لسان داوود وعيسى بن مريم: ذلك بما عصوا وكانوا يعتدون: كانوا لا يتناهون عن منكر فعلوه: لبئس ما كانوا يفعلون ».

وحدد له الحدود وبين له الاحكام وقال: « ومن يتعد حدود الله فقد ظلم نفسه » وقال: « ومن لم يحكم بما أنزل الله فأولئك هم الظالمون – فأولئك هم الكافرون – فأولئك هم الفاسقون »

أما بعد فقد قال الله تبارك وتعالى: « يا أيها الذين آمنوا ان جاءكم فاسق بنبأ فتبينوا أن تصيبوا قوماً بجهالة فتصبحوا على ما فعلتم نادمين » وقال صلى الله عليه وسلم: « آية المنافق ثلاث اذا حدث كذب واذا وعد أخلف واذا أوتى من خان »

وقد علمت ان بعضاً ممن أطلب لهم الهداية من الله ولا أزيد قد نقلوا عني ما الله يعلم انني منه براء ونسبوا الي ما لا يصدر الا عن



المفسدين وشوهوا كثيراً من الروايات التي يروونها عني بالباسها  
لباس التغيرير والتمويه

وكذبوا على أولئك العرب المخلصين الذين قد روى عن رسول الله  
صلى الله عليه وسلم في أمرهم ما يفتخرون به فقد روي عنه عليه  
الصلاة والسلام انه قال : « اني لاشم ريح الايمان من جهة اليمن » أو  
كما قال وروي عنه صلى الله عليه وعلى آله وسلم انه قال : « العلم  
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ما أقول وكيل

نحن بحمد الله مؤمنون من أهل السنة والجماعة نؤمن بالله  
وملائكته وكتبه ورسله واليوم الآخر ونعمل على ما يوافق الشريعة  
المطهرة مبلغ علمنا وطاقتنا - نأمر بالمعروف وننهي عن المنكر  
ونجتهد في ازالة البدع الضارة بالدين وأهل الدين غير مرأين ولا  
مداجين ولا ماكرين ولا مخادعين -

لا ندعي شيئاً من الدعاوي العريضة التي يمويه بها ذور الاوهام على  
عقول العوام فلا ننتحل المهدية كما يزعمون : ولا نشعوذ كما  
يفترون : ولا نزعم كشفًا ولا شيئاً من علم الغيب كما يشيعون

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لا ندعي شيئاً من الدعاوي العريضة التي يمويه بها ذوو الاوهام على  
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يفترون: ولا نزعّم كشفاً ولا شيئاً من علم الغيب كما يشيعون

( سبحانك لا علم لنا الا ما عتنا انك أنت العزيز الحكيم )  
بل لا نتصدر لشيء مما يحاوله ذوو البطالة العاجزون . ولا نريد  
خلافه ولا ملكا كما يتوهمون ولا نطلب جاهاً ولا مالا ولا شيئاً  
من الاغراض الدنيوية الفانية التي يتهالك عليها الطامعون .  
اللهم الا ما يكون بلاغاً الى الدار الآخرة ووسيلة لمصلحة الاسلام  
والمسلمين من طريق شرعي نتحرى فيه ما استطعنا وسواء علينا في  
طلب الخير أظهرت النتيجة على يدينا أو على أيدي واحد من  
العاملين المسلمين فانا ( علم الله ) نطلب الخير للخير ونتباعد ما  
استطعنا عن الشر وكل ما نهتم به هو الصلاح والاصلاح . وما  
توفيقى الا بالله عليه توكلت وعليه أنيب .  
ولقد كان لي من سلفي الطاهر اسوة حسنة : وفي طريق تربيتي وما  
يعلم العارفون بي من الاخلاق التي أنا عليها وسيري وسيرتي منذ  
نشأتى أكبر برهان على ما ذكرته بحمد الله ولا فخر .  
سيقول القراء - اذا فما تلك الضجة التي شغلت كثيراً من الافكار  
وما هو السبب في هذا الذي يزعمونه من البغى والخروج التشويش  
على الدولة في الوقت الذي أصبحت فيه على شفا جرف هار من  
المرج بسبب اختلاف أحزابها وتغير أطوارها وعدم تماسك رجالها  
والقاء زمامها بيد أغرارها وتغلب شرارها على خيارها مع ما انتابها

من اعتداء المعتدين وما تخشاه من أيدي الطامعين -  
 قل خلق هذا للدولة موظفوها (وبعض ضباطها) المسارقون أولئك  
 الذين ملأت الدولة الآن بهم جوف المنهاصب وتركتمهم على  
 غلوائهم وصلفهم وكبريائهم يعيشون في الأرض بلا خشية ولا  
 حياء فتراهم يستبيحون الحرم وينتهكون الاعراض يتجاهرون  
 بالمعاصي والخروج عن الحدود التي حدها الله ورسوله غير مباليين.  
 ولا متأدبين فلا الصلاة يؤدون ولا الشهر يصومون ولا هم في  
 حكمهم يعذبون. ولا لاصاغرهم (بله أنفسهم) عن الايغال في  
 أرزاق الرعية يزجرون.

وناهيك بالرشوة وعكوفهم عليها مع عبثهم في أموال الرعية  
 واحتقارهم للامة العربية وللغة العربية واهمال جميع المصالح العامة  
 واهانة رجال الدين الى غير ذلك مما لا يصدر الا عن القوم الظالمين  
 الغادرين.

كل هذا مع رغبة أولئك العجم الذين لا خلاق لهم في ايجاد  
 القلاقل واثارة الفتن ليتكنوا من حمل الدولة (فوق ما تحمله من  
 الاثقال التي تنوء بها الدول ذات القوة) على جمع الجنود وتجهيز  
 الجيوش حتى تكون لهم مندوحة للاشتراك مع المتعهدين (سراً)  
 في تلك التعهدات الكبيرة التي تكال فيها أموال الدولة جزافاً

فيملأون من هذه النار بطونهم وبطون شركائهم ولا يهتمهم بعد ذلك عمرت الدولة أم خربت صلحت أحوال الناس أو فسدت .  
 ليت شعري اذا كان هذا عمل الحاكمين في جزيرة العرب منبع النبوة ومهبط الوحي بين ظهراني عرب البادية السذج الخالص وعلى مرأى ومسمع منهم ( بل قد ينال أهل البادية انفسهم ما تئن منه اهل الحاضرة ) :

أترى انه مع هذا يمكن للعربي أن يصدق أن حكامه مسلمون مهما حاولت اقناعه؟ ومهما أطلت في ايراد الحجج عليه بالطرق المختلفة في حين ان بلاغة العمل فوق كل بلاغة وبيانه فوق كل بيان؟  
 كلا لاجرم انه قد أصبح من البديهي أن عمال الدولة الاحداث الاغرار هم الذين يثيرون عليها الفتن ويقيمون عليها القلاقل وسواء علينا أكان ذلك بعلم المراجع العليا ( كما يعبرون ) بحيث يكون سكوتهم عن ذلك لاي مقصد من المقاصد أو بغير علم منهم - ولقد نمتي اليها في المدة الاخيرة ان أمثال هؤلاء الفتيان قد أصبح يبيعون البلدان ولا سيما العربية بأبخس الاثمان .

وبعد فقد عرف القراء مما نشر قبل الآن في بعض الجرائد المصرية اننا لما عدنا من طلب العلم بالديار المصرية وغيرها الي بلاد اليمن حيث المهة الاول لنا وجدنا الناس على أسوأ مما تركناهم عليه من

شدة النفرة بينهم وبين رجال الحكومة لما وصفناه آنفاً  
 ووجدناهم كذلك على ما هم عليه من الامتناع عن دفع الاعشار  
 والمحكمة الى الطواغيت واختلال الامن العام في جميع الانحاء  
 بسبب المطالبات بالثأر وترك الحكومة حبل الناس على غاربهم  
 ذلك الامر الذي أوقف جميع الاعمال والحركات سواء التجارية  
 والزراعية وغيرها الى حد كان الرجل معه لا يمكنه أن يخرج من  
 محله قيد شبر الا اذا كان معه من عشيرته من يجيرونه ومن  
 الاسلحة ما يدفع به الصائلة (وما أكثرها) .

ولو رأيت اذ ذاك لرأيت ما يفتت الاكباد ويمنع الرقاد ويطيل  
 السهاد .

نعم لو رأيت لرأيت المساجد معطلة والشرعية مهملة والارض  
 قاحلة والمصائب متواصلة فلا يمكن لرجل أن يخرج الى مصلاه الا  
 حاملاً سلاحه مصاحباً رفقته لتتولى حراسته بل لو رأيت لرأيت  
 من السلب والنهب وقتل الارواح البريئة ما تزعج منه النفوس  
 الثابتة وتلين له القلوب القاسية

بل لرأيت من الحروب الاهلية الدائمة بين القبائل والفتائر والافخاذ  
 ما يذهب بالاموال ويؤيم النساء ويبيتم الاطفال ويقطع النسل  
 ويقلل الذرية -

كل ذلك تراه اذ ذاك حاصلًا على مرأى ومسمع من الحكومة ورجالها دون أن تحرك ساكنًا أو تعمل عملاً لاييقاف سيل هذا البلاء الجارف .

وقد لا تجد لاحد من الحكام والموظفين اهتماماً بأمر من هذه الامور الا ما يكون من ورائه ربح له على انفراده أو بالاشتراك مع بعض أعوانه .

ولقد وصلت الحال بالحكومة نفسها الى انها لا يمكنها أن تستقي من مواقع الماء حتى تعد العدة وتجهز الجيوش وتحتمي بالجار ( فكيف هذا العار )

لا ريب مع هذا أن اشتد الضيق بالكافة وصار العقلاء يبحثون عن مخرج من هذه الحالة

( ولو يجدون ملجأ أو مغارات أو مدخلا لولوا اليه وهم يجمعون ) لما اشتدت الازمة وأراد الله أن يفرجها جعل لنا من ذلك مخرجاً اذ وفقني للدخول بين القبيلتين عظيمتين للصالح ( والصالح خير ) مهدى الله الذين آمنوا لما اختلفوا فيه من الحق باذنه ووضع أساس الصالح ( وما كان ليوضع لو لا ارادة الله وقوته الالهية ) على اسقاط الامم السابقة واحلال التحاكم الى الشريعة المطهرة محل التحاكم الى الطواغيت واقامة الحدود الشريعة على حسب ما أنزل الله في



كتابه وما بينته سنة نبيه صلى الله عليه وعلى آله وسلم وما أرشد اليه هدى السلف الصالح والائمة المجتهدين رضوان الله عليهم أجمعين .

بذلك استتب الامن في أرض هاتين القبيلتين وسارت التجارة وصلحت الزراعة وأمن الناس على الانفس والامال وهذا البال وحفظت الذراري والاطفال وأقيمت الصلاة بين الافراد والجماعات وحفظ على حدود الله تعالى (ومن يتعد حدود الله فقد ظلم نفسه )

هنالك اشربت أعناق القبائل الاخرى للانتظام في هذا السلك ومالت نفوسهم الى الراحة النفسية وترك العناء الحاصل بسبب التنافر والتخاصم والتخاذل

ومن المعلوم ان أنفة العرب وشهامتهم تمنعان كل قبيلة من البدء بطلب الصلح فتتابعت الى رسلهم سرا فوق الله هذا العبد الضعيف الى الدخول بين عدة قبائل فتم الصلح بينهم ببركة الاخلاص

ففازوا بمثل ما فاز اخوانهم السابقون فكان ذلك قذى في أعين بعض المأمورين (ولو أخلصوا لله ولرسوله ولحكومتهم وأمتهم لكان ذلك من أكبر أمانيتهم لعموم الامن وسهولة ادائهم لمأموريتهم )

نعم كان ذلك قذري في أعين البعض وفرصة للبعض الآخر اذ جعلوا هذا الامر متكئاً يتكؤن عليه لحمل الدولة على انفاق النفقات الباهظة فيما لاطائل تحته وبذلك يكون لهم ولشركائهم من المتعهدين ما يشاؤون من الارباح -

لهذا أخذ الذين في قلوبهم مرض يشيعون الاشاعات ويخلقون الترهات ويذيعون الاباطيل والمفتريات ويلهبون نيران الثورة من الجانبين فاجتهدت في اطفاء تلك الجذوة في أول اشتعالها بالحكمة والموعظة الحسنة مع حسن المعاملة وكثرة المجاملة وطلب التفاهم حتى يزول ما علق بالنفوس من سيئة فلم أفلح اذ غلبت غواية الغاوين على رشد الراشدين ووجدت عبارات الضالين أذناً صاغية عند ذوي الحل والعقد من رجال الدولة البعيدين عن مشاهدة الحالة والحكم عليها بالقسط

فصدرت الأوامر بتجهيز الجيوش وارسالها المقاتلة هذا الضعيف الذي لا حول له ولا قوة الا بالله العلي العظيم وذلك بسبب ما ظهر على يديه من الاصلاح الذي لم يرق في أعين الحكام مع ظهور هائده -

فلما رأى العرب ذلك داخلهم في حكامهم الريب وأخذت نفوسهم تفكر حتى ثبت لديهم (وبعيد أن تقنع البدوي بضد ما

يظهر له العيان ) ان هؤلاء العمال انما هم على غير الملة الاسلامية  
وظنوا وبعض الظن اثم ان هذه الجيوش انما أرسلت لمقاتلتهم حتى  
يردوهم عن دينهم ( ان استطاعوا )

فتأهبوا للدفاع عن أنفسهم ودينهم وعن راحتهم وأمنهم ودبت  
فيهم الحمية العربية والغيرة الاسلامية  
فأخذت ألطف من حدتهم لأعيدهم الى الحكمة والسكون حتى  
أقنعتهم بأن يقفوا موقف المدافعين عن أنفسهم وأموالهم  
وأعراضهم مع القيام بواجب الدين .

وقفوا هذا الموقف حتى حضر سعيد باشا الى اليمن بجيشه الجرار  
( والرجل على ما يظهر من العقلاء المتبصرين ) عندئذ لم يرد  
سعادته أن يقتحم ذلك الصعب حتى يرود الامر نفسه فعمد  
وعمدت الى التلاقي فلما خبرنا وعرف الحق وظهر له كذب تلك  
الاشاعات ظهور الشمس لذي عينين اتفق معنا على أن نبقي على  
ما نحن عليه وان الحكومة تقبل أن تكون الاحكام في هذه القطعة  
العربية على حسب الشريعة الاسلامية

فلما تم هذا الاتفاق بيننا أجهدت نفسي في مساعدة الدولة حسبة  
للّه تعالى وساعدتها على مد التلغراف ولم تكن قد تمكنت من  
عهد وجودها باليمن من ذلك على ما كان فيها من كثرة النفقات

التي كانت تذهب أدراج الرياح

وقد أعنتها بعشرة آلاف عود من القوائم اللازمة لذلك وكانت قبل ذلك تدفع في العود الواحد ليرة ثم لا تكاد تضع ما تبتاعه من الاعواد حتى تتخطفه أيدي السلبة الذين لا تصل اليهم أيدي الحكومة

كل ذلك عملته وأقنعت العرب بدفع ما تيسر من الاعشار باسم الزكاة ولم يكونوا يدفعون للحكومة شيئاً وعملت غير ذلك من المساعدات التي لا أري سعة في الوقت لشرحها كنت أظن اني بهذا العمل قد خدمت الدولة اجل خدمة وان رجالها سيحفظون لي ذلك ويعرفون لي اخلاصي لدولتي وملتي وديني وقومي فيصادقون على هذا الاتفاق ويدعون هذه البقعة التي لم تختلط بالاجنبي تقام فيها حدود الله ويتركونني آمر بالمعروف وأنهى عن المنكر مرتاح الضمير من غير تشويش ولا تكدير

ولكن ساء مثل القوم اذ كرروا من الحوادث ما أظهر ان ذلك الاتفاق لم يكن الا خدعة يراد بها تخدير أعصاب العرب الى أن يدخل أولئك الماكرون في أحشاء الامة فيقطعوا أوصالها ويبطلوا أعمالها ( ما الله بغافل عما يعمل الظالمون . )

لم يرع العرب بعد ذلك الا ما فاجأهم به الموظفون من ان المراجع

العالية ( كما يعبرون ) لم

تصدق على الصلح بهذه الطريقة ثم نكثوا ايمانهم من بعد عهدهم  
وطعنوا في الدين وأظهروا الرضاء بعدم اقامة الحدود أخذوا  
يشنعون على اقامة حدود الله وترك الحق لولي الدم وقالوا ان المدنية  
تأبي ذلك

ثم أظهروا لنا منشورات نشرتها الدولة صرحوا فيها بأنهم تفضلوا  
على المسلمين في هذه بلاد أو منحوهم ( من عند أنفسهم ) منحة  
العمل بالشرعية في المدنيات دون الجنائيات

وشنعوا بمن يتشدد في طلب ذلك في الجنائيات الى غير ذلك مما  
يخالف مقاصدهم وتأباه أغراضهم ودستورهم الحديث .

علمنا بذلك فقلنا لا حول ولا قوة الا بالله العلي العظيم

ياالله ولهذا الخذلان متى كانت الشريعة تقام دون أن تقام حدودها  
وما الذي يمنع ذلك في بلاد العرب وهي خلو من كل الاجانب عن  
الدين

فاذا فرضنا ان الدولة تجد صعوبة في تنفيذ الشريعة كما هي في  
غير بلاد العرب فما هي الصعوبة في تنفيذها هنا مع رضي الاهالي  
بذلك وسرورهم به وظهور لنتائجه لهم وتشددهم في طلبه ؟

ثم ما هي تلك المدنيات التي منحونا الحكم فيها على مقتضى

الشريعة المطهرة ولا ثروة عندنا ولا تجارة ولا تزاحم في البلاد يقتضى منازعات مدنية لا يفصل فيها بالتراضي أو بحكم محكمين ؟

أتراهم توهموا انهم عملوا اصلاحا في البلاد فأوجدوا فيها تجارة لن تبور وصناعات رائجات وزراعات مثمرة الى غير ذلك فظنوا ان المنازعات المدنية شئ كبير يعد من المنح لهؤلاء المتمسكين بدينهم ان يتفضل عليهم بأن يكون الحكم فيها على حسب الشريعة الاسلامية أعوذ بالله من محاربة الله والعمل على سخط الله .

لقد كنت أسمع قبل الآن أن تلك المفاصد التي رأيتها ورآها كل من وطئت قدمه الحرمين الشريفين تلك المفاصد التي تقشعر منها أبدان الشريعة المطهرة وتنهار بها أبنيتها وذلك الخوف الذي يلزم حجاج بيت الله الذي جعله الله حرماً آمناً مع فشو السلبية وقطاع الطريق وقتلة الانفس الطاهرة البريئة كل ذلك كنت أسمع ان بعض رجال الدولة القائمين بالامر يقصدون الى وجوده ويساعدون عليه لمآرب يريدونها وحاجات في أنفسهم يقضونها

وامه لولا هذه المآرب وتلك الحاجات لعملت الدولة (وما هي السعيفة العاجزة عن ايجاد الا من في هذه القطعة الطاهرة) على تاميننا للمسلمين الذين توقعهم الحماية الاسلامية والقصد

الى تأدية الواجب الشرعي أن يتركوا اباؤهم اخوانهم وأزواجهم وعشيرتهم وأوطانهم وكافة مصالحهم الدنيوية ويأتوك رجالا وعلى كل ضامر يأتين من كل فج عميق ليشهدوا منافع لهم ويذكروا اسم الله في أيام معلومات على ما رزقهم من بهيمة الانعام.

كنت أسمع بذلك فلا آلو جهداً في الدفاع عن الدولة ورجالها أما الآن وقد رأيت ورأى العرب وقوف أولئك العمال في سبيل اقامة الحدود الشرعية وتجهيز الجيوش لمحاربتنا على ذلك مع صدهم عن سبيل الله وعن المسجد الحرام وحبس الذاهبين من اليمن لاداء الفريضة

فقد كان يداخلني الريب ولا أخطئ اذا قلت ان دوى الرأي من العرب أصبحوا بحيث لا يمكن اقناعهم بغير ذلك ومع ما أنا عليه من الارشاد الى السلم والعمل اليه ودعوة العرب عليه والى ان يقفوا في موقف المدافع لم تلبث الحكومة ان أشاعت انها جيشت لرجال اليمن جيوشا لا قبل لهم بها وانها أغدقت عليهم من وفير المؤن والذخائر ما يكفي لاستئصالنا.

وأباحث لهم تحريق المنازل كما هي عاداتها في العرب المسلمين ، رعاياها دون غيرهم كما أباحث لهم التمثيل والتنكيل والضرب

على أيدي رعييتها بما لا قبل لهم به ذلك الامر الذي حظرتة على نفسها قبل أعدائها الخلل ونشرت المنشرات في شأنه خاصة على حسن المعاملة واطهار المجاملة في بدء حربها معهم .

لما سمعنا بذلك تأهبنا مكرهين للدفاع عن أنفسنا وانتظرنا قضاء الله واذا بهم قد صرفهم صارف من الحوادث الاخرى ففضلوا العودة الى تلك الخديعة الاولى خديعة الكلام في الصلح ريثما تزول الموانع وتتوفر لديهم الاسباب لاتمام مقاصدهم .

عندئذ أرسلوا لنا رسولهم الشيخ توفيق ليخاطبنا في ذلك فعرضنا عليه المقابلة مع سعيد باشا فأخبرنا بانه مفوض اليه في الامر وان فيه الكفاية فقلنا مرحبا بحقن الدما على أساسنا الاول ألا وهو أن تكون الاحكام في ديارنا على حسب الشريعة الاسلامية لا فرق بين مدنيها وجنائيتها وغير ذلك وان يعرف لنا بصفة رسمية ذلك الحق الطبيعي الاسلامي الا وهو الامر بالمعروف والنهي عن المنكر حتى لا يكون لاحد من المأمورين الفضولين ذوى الغايات سبيل علينا اذا نحن قمنا بما علينا من هذا الواجب أودعت الحال لان نقوم بالتوفيق بين القبائل ذلك مع بقاء الحال على ما هي عليه للدولة

فتركنا وانتظرنا اجابة الدولة فأهملونا ساخرين منا ( سخر الله منهم ) وجهزوا لنا الجيوش ثانيا وأعدوا لنا حملتين عظيمتين ذاتي



بأس شديد كما أشاعوا والله أشد بأسا وأشد تنكيلا  
 حملت حملتا هما في آن واحد أحد هما من الشمال وهي مؤلفة  
 من عدد عظيم من الجيش العامل بعدده المستوفاة وآلاته النارية  
 ومدبراته الحربية ومدافعه السريعة الطلقات وغيرها والبعيدة المرمي  
 وعدد كبير جدا كما أذاعوا واشتهر في الجرائد السيارة من أتباع  
 الشريف حسين بن علي تحت قيادته وقيادة صاحبي السعادة ولديه  
 المحروسين

وقد لا يخفي على أحد ما نشر في ذلك الحين من أن هذا الجيش  
 المشترك قد أمرته الدولة بالمؤن والذخائر الكافية لتدمير جميع  
 البلاد العربية وثانيهما من الجنوب في جيزان وهذه الحملة القوية  
 كلها من الجيش العامل ذي الحول والطول وأذاعوا ان هاتين  
 الحملتين ستتقابلان فتأتیان على جميع العباد والبلاد التي في  
 طريقهما

فاعتمدنا على الله الذي لا حول لنا ولا قوة الا به وفوضنا أمرنا اليه  
 سبحانه وقلنا « كم من فئة قليلة غلبت فئة كثيرة باذن الله والله مع  
 الصابرين »

ولقد ساعدتنا والحق يقال معونة الله وله الشكر بشهادة العرب  
 وعدم وصول شئ من هذه الاخبار الكبيرة والتهويلات الكثيرة التي

لا يعرف أمثالنا اعراب البادية ما القصد منها  
لما اعيتنا الحيل ولم نتمكن من الوصول الى حل سلمي تحفظ معه  
حدود الله وشريعته اضطررنا الى الدفاع عن أنفسنا ووقفت العرب  
موقف المدافع حتى اذا وقعت الواقعة مع كل من الجيشين جيش  
الشمال وجيش الجنوب ظهر ان تلك الرعود والبروق جعجة بلا  
طحن وان تلك الاشاعات ليست الا كفارغ البندق اذ زلزل ذانك  
الجيشان عند النزال زلزالا شديداً . ونصرنا الله عليهم وأعد لهم  
عذابا عظيما .

ذلك ان جيش الشمال المشترك ناله من الخذلان ما أوقع كثيراً من  
ادواته ومؤنه وذخائره ومهماته في أيدي العرب  
فاضطر جناب الشريف هداه الله الى أن يتبع خطة أخرى هي خطة  
توسيط الرحم تارة وبعض المؤثرات التي لا تخفى تارة أخرى حتى  
يتمكن من أن يسير الي جهة أبهى من طريق وعرة غير مسلوكة  
تبعد عن الطريق المعتادة الموصلة بينها وبين القنفذة تلك الطريق  
التي مرابط العرب اليمن فيها -

وقد فضله على طولهِ ووَعورته لكيلا يعود مخذولا الا بعد ان  
يدخل أبهى بأية طريقة كأنما مأموريته انما كانت دخول أبهى  
فكان ذلك من غير ان يلتقي بالعرب اليمنية مرة أخرى

ولم يلبث ان خرج منها ( مع البازى عليه سواد ) وسار في طريقة الثالث ( الذي هو أشد وعورة مما جاء منه ) سار خائفا يترقب وقد فضل هذا الطريق الثالث الشديد الوعورة الطويل المسافات المشتمل على أصعب العقبات القليل المياه ( طريق بيثه ) ذلك الطريق الذي يسير الى شرقي الطائف جهة نجد لانه طريق الفرارين المخلولين المشردين .

وقد بلغني انهم ستروا الحقائق وأخذوا يزعمون ان دخولهم ( أبهى ) كان بما لهم من الغلبة ولكننا نحن العرب العارفين لا يهمننا كلام المتكلمين اذا ما خلوا بارض بعيدة

فنحن رجال الاعمال لا اعتماد لنا الا على الله وهو حسبنا ونعم الوكيل

أما جيش الجنوب فقد انتهى أمره بواقعة الحفائر وما أدراك ما واقعة الحفائر:

تلك الواقعة التي وقف فيها العرب موقف المدافعين على مياه الحفائر على بعد ثلاثة أرباع الساعة من جيزان وقد تترس جيش الحكومة المنظم بجيزان وجبالها وتمكنوا في قلاعهم وطوابيهم وثبتوا مدافعهم الضخمة على الجبال والاكمام المجاورة للبحر وأمدتهم مراكبهم الحربية بالمساعدة وأخذوا يزعمون العرب

باطلاق المدافع من البحر والبر والعرب صابرون مستسلمون لقضاء الله وقدره حتى اذا كان يوم الاثنين منتصف جمادى الثانية سنة ١٣٢٩ خرجت قوة الجيش المنظم هاجمة ومعها المدافع سريعة الطلقات تحت حماية المدافع التي فوق الاكمام والتي في المراكب الحربية والتي في القلاع وعملوا من حيلهم العسكرية ما شاء الله أن يعملوا كل ذلك

ولا حول للعرب ولا قوة الا بالله العلي العظيم الذي القى عليهم الصبر فثبتوا وذكروا الله كثيرا فصدقهم الله وعده للصابرين وانتصروا من بعد ما ظلموا سيعلم الذين ظلموا أي منقلب ينقلبون .

نعم صبر العرب ودافعوا عن اقامة حدود الدين فدارت رحا الحرب على ذلك الجيش العرمم حتى هلك كله الا النزر اليسير الذي نجاه الفرار ولم تعده الجراح وقد وقع في أيدي العرب من البنادق والذخائر والمهمات والمدافع السريعة الطلقات والمكنات ما جعل لهم قوة فوق قوتهم ونشطهم نشاطا يقدره قدره من يعرف الحالة عادت البقية الباقية من الجيشين الى جيزان فسلط الله عليها ومن جاءوا من المدد اليها ريحا وجنودا جوية وأمراضا وبائية ذهبت بالباقي وبالمدد الا نذر نذير اضطر أخيرا الى الجلاء عن جيزان

فاستراح وأراح والله من ورائهم محيط وهو على كل شيء قدير .  
 بعد هذا كله لم نلبث ان جاءنا من سعادة والي العسير كتاب  
 يجنح فيه للسلم تاريخه يرجع الى ما بعد ابتداء الحوادث الاخيرة  
 مع الطليان

فصدعنا بأمر الله وجنحنا معه متوكلين على الله  
 وأرسلنا الى سعادته رسولا من كبار العرب ليخاطبه في ذلك  
 حسبما طلب

وزودنا ذلك الرسول بجميع النصائح السلمية وأرسلنا معه خطابا  
 أبنا فيه مقاصدنا وميلنا التام الى الاتحاد وجمع الكلمة واننا نريد أن  
 نكون اخوانا وعلى الحق أعوانا

فسمى الى ذلك الرسول في طريقه وهو على مقربة من أبهى أن  
 سعادة الوالي انما يريد بنا خدعة وانه قد نصب له شراك غيلة  
 فوقف خارج المدينة حيث مأمنه وأرسل اليه الكتاب وأعلمه بأنه  
 قد جاء ملبيا داعي السلم وانه يريد المخاطبة في ذلك ليعلم ما  
 ينتهي عليه الامر والله الموفق .

فما كان جوابه الا أن أرسل اليه مكتوبا طويل الذيول مملوءاً  
 بالعظمة والصلف والكبرياء لا تخلو كلمة منه من التهديد  
 والوعيد ورفض الاتفاق وهاكم شيئاً مما جاء فيه بالحرف الواحد .

( قد أخذت كتابا من حسين افندي وفيه يذكر انكم سالتموه عن بيان الشروط مع الحكومة وكيفيتها فعجبت من هذا الطلب - فهذه الحال تصير الشبهة متمكنة وان الحادث الذي هو الآن واقع مع الكفار مناسب لافكاركم فلا حاجة للشروط - فهل تصير شروط بين الحكومة والرعية فما وظائف الرعية الا الطاعة للحكومة ولا وامرها -

وقد عزمنا متوكلين على الله أن نرسل حملة عسكرية لتربية العاصين المخالفين بشدة والعفو عن المطيعين واعطائهم الأمان ولم يكن طلبنا اتحاد عسير عن عجز منا واستعانة بهم - وان القوة التي تزيد عن الخمسين طابورا المتحشدة في الزيدية والزهرة واللحية والتي عندنا مقدار سبعة عشر طابوراً هي كافية لكل عدو في اليمن وعسير في الداخل وفي الخارج وانتم تعلمون بذلك وأيضاً تقدرون عاقبة البغي والفساد الخ الخ )

وصلنا هذا المكتوب ووصلتنا مكاتيب اخرى ارسلت من بعض رجال الحكومة الى العرب وفيها أكثر من ذلك

فما أظن القارئ يخفى عليه شدة اسفنا على ان رجال الدولة الآن على هذا النمط وانهم هم الذين يخلقون الفتن ويثيرونها كلما قربت من الانتهاء وانهم دائما واقفون حجر عثرة في سبيل اطفاء

الفتن على نحو ما سبق بيانه ولا سيما في مثل هذه الظروف  
والاوقات الحرجة

هذههم الله أو بدلنا قوما غيرهم ثم لا يكونوا أمثالهم -  
ماذا يفهم المنصف من هذا كله سوى أننا دائما نعمل للسلم  
وعمال الدولة يعلمون على هدم قواعده - نعمل للاصلاح  
وأولئك المارقون يعملون للافساد نعمل لاقامة الشريعة المطهرة  
وهم يعملون لمحوها ومحو آثارها -

ما هذه البلية التي ابتلى الله بها الدولة وامتحن بها الامة اذ ألقى بها  
في أيدي هذه الفئة التي تريد أن تهوي بها حتى تسقطها في  
مكان سحيق .

كيف تؤمن بعد هذا غائلة أمثال أولئك الاشرار الذين يشرون  
الحياة الدنيا بالآخرة ويصدون عن سبيل الله ويعملون مع العرب  
هذه الافاعيل ويبادرونهم بامثال ما سبق من الاقاويل

وهم يعلمون ما عند العرب من الانفة وعزة النفس وانهم لا يرضون  
بالدنية لا سيما مع كونهم أصحاب اليد العليا ولهم الغلبة الي الآن  
ثم هم مع ذلك ينصرون الله ورسوله ويتمسكون بطلب اقامة  
الشريعة المطهرة واقامة حدودها

ولا يعملون شيئا مما يعمله أولئك الاتراك معهم فهم يقيمون

الصلاة ويؤتون الزكاة ويصومون رمضان ويحافظون على الاوامر وترك النواهي ما أمكنهم في حين ان أولئك لا يعملون شيئاً من ذلك بل تراهم يجعلون المساجد ثكنات لعساكرهم ومستشفيات لمرضاهم وأمكنة لفسوقهم ولهوهم ولعبهم وكثيراً ما دخل كبارهم في المساجد بكتلابهم على مرأى من العرب الخالص وعملوا من الاعمال الكفرية ما لا نجد في الوقت سعة لسرده

فالعرب ينصرون الله ورسوله ولا يؤذون الا في الله وطلب العمل بكتاب الله وسنة رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم واطهار نور الله في حين ان أولئك يريدون ان يطفئوا نور الله بأفواههم ويأبى الله الا ان يتم نوره ولو كره الكافرون ليت شعري ماذا يطلب منا ومن العرب بعد هذا ؟

أنستكين لهذه القوة التي يشرحها سعادة الوالي وننتظر حتى يحرقوا بقية بيوتنا ويستبيحوا أموال العرب ويذبحوا الابناء ويستحيوا النساء ( كما توعدونا بذلك وهم في جيزان فدر الله كيدهم في نحرهم وجعل عليهم دائرة السوء )

أو نسلمهم أنفسنا ونتاجل عن ديننا ودياننا وآخرتنا أو نساعدهم على إعادة الحال على ما كانت عليه وننتظر حتى يقيض الله لبعض ذوى الامر منهم من يشترينا شراء سقط المتاع



كما اشتروا غيرنا من البلاد العربية كطرابلس فيما سمعنا .  
 اذا لاصبحنا عندهم من أكابر الناس وأحسن العاملين الذين  
 يكافؤنهم باشر كههم فيما يكسبون ولكان الله علينا الحجة البالغة  
 وصب علينا وعليهم من عذابه ما يعرفه المؤمنون

أظن انه لا يوجد مسلم عاقل يريد بالسلام والمسلمين خيرا يمكنه  
 ان يقول الا انه يجب علينا ان نعد عدة الدفاع وأن لا نلقى بأيدينا  
 الى التهلكة لا سيما بعد ان حركوا جميع جيوشهم من الجنوب  
 والشمال قصد مهاجمتنا على نحو ما وصفه ذلك الباشا في كتابه  
 السابق

وعسى الله أن يأتي بالفتح أو أمر من عند الله فيصبحوا على ما  
 أسروا في أنفسهم نادمين - ان تنصروا الله ينصركم ويثبت  
 أقدامكم . والذين كفروا فتعسا لهم وأضل أعمالهم ذلك بان  
 الذين كفروا اتبعوا الباطل وان الذين آمنوا اتبعوا الحق من ربهم -  
 كذلك يضرب الله للناس أمثالهم .

مما يعجب له القارئ مع هذا ان الجيوش متحركة لمهاجمتنا  
 وأعوانهم يشيعون ما يشيعون ثم هم مع ذلك يخادعوننا اذ  
 يوعزون الى بعض الرجال من أعوانهم تارة ومن أصدقائنا تارة  
 أخرى بارسال الخطابات الخصوصية اليها بطلب الصلح مع الدولة

من غير ان يكون في تلك الخطابات اشارة الى ان لاحد رجال الدولة حتى ولا لاصاغرهم دخل ظاهر في هذه المخاطبات .

ومع ذلك فاني وان كنت واقفا على تلك الحيل وعلمت منهم تلك الخدع ما زلت أجب على هذه الخطابات بالترحيب بالصلح وحقن الدماء على أساس العمل بالشرعية الغراء واقامة الحدود الشرعية وذلك هو الشجاء في حلوقهم والقذى في أعينهم وقد أذكر لمن يخاطبونني اننا قبل اراقة الدماء بالفعل بين العرب والترك وقبل حصول الانتصارات المتوالية للعرب كنت موافقا على الصلح جاعلا أساس شروطه العمل بالشرعية واقامة الحدود الشرعية وأعجب لاني لا أعرف طريقا للمخاطبات مع الدولة الآن بصفة جدية ما دام عمالها على نحو ما وصفنا آنفاً .

ولعل حضرات القراء الذين يريدون المحافظة على الدين يتساءلون بعد هذا عما يضمن القيام بالعقود وعدم نكثها كما سبق وما يوافقنا أن يكون مثل هذا لو فرض حصوله على لسان رجال الدولة أنفسهم ذوي الحل والعقد انما يقصد به الخدعة انا نترك الجواب على ذلك لفطنة اخواننا المؤمنين العارفين - هذا بعد أمرنا أجملائه تبيناً لكم : ومن وصل الينا من أصدقائنا على بعد الشقة ووعورة المسلك يعرف ما نحن عليه في باديتنا من اقامة الشعائر

الدنية واستتباب الامن الى الحد الذي يكاد معه يعتقد الانسان انه لو ترك ما شاء الله من المتاع والاموال في الطرقات العامة لا تمسه يد لامس ولا تمتد اليه عين الغير

ولا حاجة لان أصف اقامة الصلوات والجمعة والجماعات وما يتبع ذلك من باقي شعائر الدين الخالية من البدع والبعيدة عن الترهات وطرق الاعنات . من كان هذا حاله فهل يدخل في عقل عاقل أو يدور بخلد انسان ما بلغني انهم يزعمونه وهو اني يد فاسدة تعيث للفساد وقد تحركها يد أجنبية أظن ان ذلك لا يمكن أن يتصوره عاقل .

على انني أعقد ان الدول الاخرى على بينة من ان العرب أشد الناس في دينهم ( بيد عرب اليمن ) وانه لا يجمعهم جامع اكبر من جامع الدفاع عن حوزة الدين والعرض وبلاد العرب كما هو معروف . تلك البلاد المملوءة بالصحارى والقفار والجبال والتي لا ينتظر أن تجني منها دولة ثمرة تبرر لها أن تعتمد الى فتح باب كثير عليها غرمه يهم الاسلام والمسلمين في مشارق الارض ومغاربها وهو من أخص شؤنهم الحيوية الدينية الا وهو باب العبث بوصية رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم وما عمله الخليفتان (رضوان الله عليهما) بعده تنفيذاً لتلك الوصية فان هذا الباب يمس مسألة من

أمهات المسائل تكثر فيها الظنون وتفتح لها العيون وما الله بغافل عما يعمل الظالمون .

وفي الختام نرجو الله أن يصلح الأحوال ويوفقنا الى ما فيه الخير ويساعدنا على استئصال الجرائم المفسدة ويكفيننا شر المفسدين ويجعلنا من الممثلين لقول الله تعالى في كتابه المبين ( ولا تهنوا ولا تحزنوا وأنتم الأعلون ان كنتم مؤمنين )

تحريرا في ٦ ربيع الثاني ١٣٣٠

الامضاء محمد علي الادريسي

### *Translation*

*This is an announcement to the people and a guide and council for the pious.*

In the name of God, the merciful and compassionate.

'Praise belongs to God who has sent down upon His servant the Book and has not assigned unto it any crookedness; right, to warn of great violence from Him, and to give good tidings unto the believers, who do righteous deeds, that theirs shall be a goodly wage therein to abide for ever' [K 18:1].

May the blessings and peace of God be upon our Sayyid Muḥammad b. ʿAbd Allāh, the truthful and trustworthy, whom God chose among the best of Arabs, whom he sent to all the people as a bearer of glad tidings and a summoner with Gods permission, and a shining light and He revealed to him the unambiguous parts of the Mighty Book: 'You are the best nation ever brought forth to men, bidding to honour, and forbidding dishonour,

and believing in God' [K 3:110].

He made clear to him the circumstances of previous peoples; in this there is a warning, and he said: 'Cursed were the unbelievers of the children of Israel by the tongue of David, and Jesus, Mary's son; that, for their rebelling and their transgression. They forbade not one another any dishonour that they committed; surely evil were the things they did' [K 5:82]. He [God] defined for him [Muḥammad] the limits and the law, and said: 'whosoever trespass the bounds of God has done wrong to himself' [K 65:1], and he said: 'Whosoever judges not according to what God has sent down—they are the unbelievers' [K 5:44].

Thereafter: God—Blessed and Exalted is He— has said: 'O believers, if an ungodly man comes to you with a tiding, make clear, lest you afflict a people unwittingly, and then repent of what you have done' [K 49:1]. And he (may God bless him and grant him peace) said: 'The hypocrite is distinguished by three things; if he gives an account, he lies; if he promises, he does not keep his word, and if trust is placed in him, he behaves treacherously' [*ḥadīth*].

I have learnt that some of these people, for whom I seek the guidance of God and nothing more, have reported things about me that God knows I am innocent of. They attributed to me acts that only come from evildoers, and they distorted many of the stories that were told about me by clothing them with deceit and distortion.

They told lies about those honest Arabs, about whom the Prophet (may God bless him and grant him peace) said things of which they may be proud: 'Surely I smell the wind of faith coming from the direction of the Yemen' [*ḥadīth*] or words to that effect. Likewise he (may the blessings and peace of God be upon him and his companions) said: 'Knowledge and wisdom are both of them Yemeni' [*ḥadīth*]. Or according to one version: 'Faith and wisdom are both of them Yemeni' [*ḥadīth*].

Things being as they are, it is right that I should relate the truth, so that my brother Muslims outside the Arab Peninsula can have peace of mind. God is the guardian of what I say.

We are, praise be to God, believers belonging to the Sunnī community. We believe in God, His angels, His books, His prophets and in the Day of Judgement. We conform to the pure

*sharīʿa*, to the extent of our knowledge and ability; we order good and forbid evil, and we strive to eliminate innovation harmful to religion and religious people; not to show off, not plotting and not deceiving.

We do not propagate anything of the widespread claims which are misinterpreted by the false ideas in the minds of the masses. Thus, we do not claim the *mahdiyya*, as they declare. We do not practice tricks such as they falsely allege. We do not claim illumination or knowledge of the hidden, such as they rumour it.

‘Glory be to Thee! We know not save what Thou hast taught us. Surely Thou art the All-knowing, the All-Wise’ [K 2:32].

We do not occupy ourselves with anything of what the false incompetents accuse us of; they are powerless. We neither claim the caliphate nor kingdom as they mistakenly suspect. We do not search for influence or wealth nor any personal worldly objectives which the greedy and covetous ones fight one another over.

[Rather we seek] what leads to heaven, and a method for the promotion of the welfare of Islam and the Muslims by lawful means; we seek in it what is of purpose. It is the same to us whether the result comes by our hands or by the hands of those who work for Islam. So, we (God knows) seek good for its own sake, and we distance us, as much as we can, from evil. All that we are concerned with is piety and reform. My success is from God alone; Him do I trust and to Him do I turn.

I have a good example in my blameless ancestors and in the way I was brought up, and in that what those who know me know about my moral standards and my conduct and the history of my life since I was young is the greatest proof of what I have mentioned, (thanks be to God) and I am not boasting.

The reader will say, therefore, what is this outcry which has occupied so many minds? And what is the reason for what they claim to be rebellion and troublemaking, and causing confusion to the state [*i.e.* the Ottoman empire] at a time when it [the state] is tottering on the edge of an abyss of difficulty. Its leaders are not acting together, and control of the state is left in the hands of the inexperienced, and the wicked triumph over the good, in addition to which it suffers from the aggressor’s onslaught and

what it fears from the hands of the greedy.

The answer is that this was created for the state by its faithless civil servants (and some of its officers)—it is with these the state has filled the important offices, and allowed them, in their extravagance, arrogance and pride, to create havoc in the land, without fear or shame. We see them making the forbidden lawful and abusing honour, openly sinning and deviating from the laws that God and his Messenger sent, without care and without manners. Prayer is not called for, nor is fasting observed, nor are they just in their judgements. Neither do they restrain their junior members (or even themselves) from interfering with the livelihood of the citizens, to say nothing about their indulgence in bribery and manipulation of public money.

They display contempt for the Arab Nation and the Arabic language. Furthermore, they neglect all public welfare, and they insult men of religion and do other things that originate from tyrannical, treacherous people.

All of this, together with the desire of those foreigners who have no qualms to create unrest and to stir up riots (in order to be able) to force the state (and the state was already carrying burdens heavy enough to make powerful states groan) to raise soldiers and mobilize armies, so they might have an excuse to join their partners (secretly) in these big undertakings into which state funds are poured randomly.

So, they fill their bellies with this fire, as well as the bellies of their partners, and are not concerned with the welfare of the state or whether the conditions of the people get better or worse.

I can scarcely believe that this was the doing of the governors of the Arab Peninsula, the origin of prophecy and the place of revelation, in the midst of humble, uncorrupted beduins—before their eyes and ears (the beduins can put up with things that will make the settled people groan).

Do you think that it is still possible for the beduin to believe that his rulers are Muslims—no matter how much you try to convince him, no matter how much proof you offer him by different means, since actions speak louder than words and what they demonstrate is conclusive.

On the contrary, it certainly has become self-evident that the new and inexperienced state governors are the ones who are

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On the contrary, it certainly has become self-evident that the new and inexperienced state governors are the ones who are

creating unrest and stirring up discord. It is the same to us whether this was done with the knowledge of the high authorities (as they are called)—in which case they remain silent for some reason—or without their knowledge. We have come to know recently that young men like these have begun to sell lands, especially Arab lands, at the most paltry price.

Readers are aware, from what was announced earlier in some of the Egyptian newspapers, that we returned from our search for knowledge in the lands of Egypt and elsewhere to the lands of the Yemen where we have our origin.

There we found the people in even greater hostility to the rulers (than before we left them) because of the things described above.

We found them refusing to pay taxes and taking their matters to judgement by the oppressors [*i.e.* the Turks].<sup>2</sup>

[There was] a general breakdown of public security in all districts because of the demands for revenge, and the government left the people with a free rein. [*i.e.* did nothing to stop this]. This was the matter which brought a halt to all work and activity, both in trade, agriculture and other domains, to such an extent that a man was unable move a foot outside his dwelling unless some of his companions went with him, equipped with arms to fight off assailants (and they were many!).

If you had seen [what went on] at that time, you would have seen something discouraging [lit.: 'to make the liver burst'], fit to prevent you from sleeping, and to prolong wakefulness. Yes, if you had seen, you would have seen the mosques lying idle, the *sharī'a* neglected, the soil lying arid and misfortunes continuous; a man could not go to his prayer without carrying arms, and being escorted by his group to serve as his guard. And you would have seen plundering and looting and killing of innocent people, fit to upset firm souls and soften hard hearts.

You would have seen endless civil wars between the tribes, clans and subdivisions, draining the money, widowing the women, orphaning the children, dividing brothers and diminishing the

2 The Arabic word *ṭawāghūt* (sing. *ṭāghūt*, Qur'ānic: 'devil, false idol') can be translated 'oppressors'. The oppressors referred to here are the Turkish governors who, since the beginning of the twentieth century, had tried to implement Ottoman civil law (the *kanūn*) in the *vilayets*.

number of offspring.

All of this you would have seen taking place, in front of the very eyes of the government and its men, without their urging any move or making any effort to stop this sweeping flood of misfortunes.

You would not find any of these governors and officials having concern for any of these matters, except where there was a profit in it, for him alone or with the help of some of his associates.

The situation reached the point where the government itself was unable to obtain water from the wells unless it made preparations, recruited an army and protected itself behind its friends. (What a disgrace!)

There is no doubt that this intensified the hardship of all, and the wise ones started to look for a way out of this situation.

(If they had found a refuge, a shelter or a place to go to, then they would have turned towards it—with haste.)

When the crisis intensified, and God wanted to bring relief, then He made us a way out; He granted me success in intervening between two great tribes to make peace (and peace is good), so God guided those who believe to the truth over which they differed, by His permission, and establishing the basis for peace (and it could not have been established but for the will of God and His divine power). This was achieved by abandoning former claims to blood [revenge] and in allowing cases to be tried before the *sharī'a* instead of before the oppressors [*i.e.* Ottoman court]. Also by implementing the punishments of the *sharī'a* in accordance with what God revealed in His book and what is reported in the Sunna of His Prophet (may God bless Him and His family and grant them peace) and that which the pious forefathers and the *mujtahidī imāms* guided us to (May God be pleased with them all).

Thereby, security was stabilized in the lands of these two tribes.

Trade picked up, agriculture flourished, people felt secure for their persons and their property. Minds calmed down and children and babies were protected. Prayer was established among individuals and in the community and the laws of God were observed ('Whoever trespasses the bounds of God has done

wrong to himself' [K 65:1].)

The other tribes were anxious ['stretched their necks'] to join this system; their members wanted peace of mind and to leave behind the hardships caused by conflict, quarrelling and disunity.

It is well-known that the pride and stubbornness of the Arabs prevents any tribe from initiating the quest for peace. Thus I pursued the matter with their representatives secretly, and God granted this humble servant success in intervening between a number of tribes and peace was established between them by the blessing of sincere faith.

Thus, they succeeded as their brothers had succeeded before them. That was a thorn in the flesh to some of the commissioners. (If they had been faithful to God and His messenger, to their government and their nation, then that would have been their greatest hope for general security and would have made it easier for them to carry out their mission.)

Yes, that was a thorn in the flesh of some and an opportunity for others, since they made this matter something to lean upon, to press the state to spend exorbitant sums of money to no avail. In this way, they and their partners among the conspirators could obtain whatever profit they wanted.

Therefore, the sick-hearted started to spread rumours, announce falsities, circulate untruth and lies, and to light the fire of revolution from both sides. I strove to quench that fire when it first was ignited, by wisdom and goodly exhortation, by good treatment, much amiability and search for mutual understanding—so that the evil inside them would come to an end. I did not succeed, since the error of the misguided ones triumphed over the right of the soundly-guided ones, and the explanations of those gone astray found attentive ears among influential men of the Government—who would never examine the situation and take charge of it with justice.

Orders went out to prepare armies and send them to fight this frail being who has no might and no power except through God most High and Mighty. That was because the reform undertaken by my hands did not please the governors, despite its manifest benefits.

So, when the Arabs saw that, they began to harbour doubts

about their rulers, until they became quite certain that these Governors were from outside the Islamic community (The beduin is convinced only by what he sees with his own eyes). They thought—and some thoughts are sinful—that these armies had been sent to fight them until they renounced their religion (if they were able).

Thus, they [the tribesmen] prepared to defend themselves and their religion, their peace of mind and their security, and they were filled with Arab fervour and the zeal of Islam.

I started to soften their sharpness and wrath into wisdom and calm, and I convinced them to adopt the stance of defending themselves, their property and honour while keeping the obligations of their faith.

They held this position until Sa'īd Pasha arrived in the Yemen with his huge army. (He is, by all appearances, a sensible and far-sighted man.) At that time he did not want to address the problem before he could explore the matter himself. He and I worked for a meeting. Then, when we informed him, and he knew the truth and the lies of these rumours became as clear as daylight to him, he agreed with us that we should leave things as they are, and that the Government should accept that verdicts in this Arab land should be passed in accordance with the Islamic *sharī'a*.

When this agreement was concluded I strove, as a duty to God most High, to support the state. Thus, I helped it to extend the telegraph, a task which the Government had not been able to perform since it established itself in the Yemen, due to the sums that had disappeared without trace.

So, I helped them with 10,000 poles needed for this. They used to pay one *lira* for one pole, and no sooner had they been put up before they were snatched away by plundering hands beyond the Government's reach.

All of this I did, and I convinced the Arabs to pay light taxes in the name of *zakāt*—they had not paid anything to the Government. I also gave other forms of support which I do not have the time to explain here. I thought that by these efforts I was doing the state a great favour, and its officials would credit me for that, and they would know my sincere devotion to my state, my government and my people, and that they would approve

of this agreement and allow the ordinances of God to be implemented in this place which has not been trodden by foreigners, and that they would leave to me to command good and forbid evil with a good conscience, unsullied and untroubled.

But, matters turned bad, since they repeated the events which made it clear that this agreement was nothing but a fraud, aimed at anaesthetising the nerves of the Arabs, so that these evildoers could enter inside the *umma* and cut its cords and neutralize its efforts (God is not unmindful of the acts of the oppressors).

The Arabs were never more surprised than when the officials suddenly announced that the high authorities (as they are called) did not approve of peace by these means.

So they [the Turks] broke the oath they had given and they defiled religion, and announced it was their pleasure *not* to implement the ordinances of God. They began to abuse upholding the punishments of God and allowing the right [of revenge] and they said that urban circumstances did not allow this.

Furthermore, they set forth proclamations which were published throughout this land. In these they declared that they granted privileges to the Muslims in the land, or they granted Muslims the favour of operating the *sharīʿa*—in civil cases but not in criminal cases.

They condemned those who continued the quest to implement these rules in criminal cases, and equally they condemned all those who contradicted their intentions and purposes and their new constitution etc.

We learned about it so we said 'There is no power and no strength save in God Most High and Mighty'.

By God a disappointment; when was the *sharīʿa* implemented and its punishments were not?

What prevents this in Arab lands which are empty of all those who are foreign to the religion [of Islam]?

If we assume that the state experienced problems in implementing the *sharīʿa* in non-Arab lands, then what is the problem in implementing it here where the people are agreeable to it and rejoice in it, and witness its results for them and they eagerly call for it?

Further, what are these civil cases for which they grant us the right to apply the *sharīʿa*; we have no wealth, no trade, and

there is no such overcrowding that would bring about civil cases that could not be decided by mutual consent—or by the decision of arbitrators?

Do you think that they imagined that they were making a reform, and that they would bring about profitable trade, marketable products, fruitful farming and so on, and that they understood that civil controversies are an important matter which could be considered a privilege for these who hold fast to their religion and graciously allow them to let verdicts be in accordance with the Islamic *sharī'a*? May God prevent us from fighting God and from acts which may anger Him.

I used to hear before that those misdeeds I saw, and which all those have set foot in the noble Sanctuaries saw—those misdeeds that make the body of the noble *sharī'a* shiver and cause her structures to crumble, that is the dread which accompanies the pilgrims to the House of God, which God has granted inviolability and protection, with the spreading of plunderers and highway robbers and murderers of pure, innocent people—I have heard that some of the officials in charge of the matter intended this to happen and encouraged it, to satisfy their own desires and fulfil their needs.

If it were not for these desires and those needs, the state (and the state is not weak and incapable of producing peace in this blessed land) would have worked to annul it [the insecurity] and establish protection for the Muslims who are filled with Islamic zeal and who work for the accomplishment of their lawful obligation as they leave their fathers, brothers, spouses and relatives, their homelands and all their worldly affairs—and 'they shall come unto thee on foot and upon every lean beast, they shall come from every deep ravine, that they may witness things profitable to them and mention God's Name on days well-known over such beasts of the flock as He has provided them' [K 22:27-8].

I used to hear about it, and I spared no effort to defend the state and its men.

But now, I have seen and the Arabs have seen how these officials are blocking the way towards the implementation of the punishments of the *sharī'a*, and that they have prepared armies to fight us over this issue. In addition they hindered them from

the way of God and from the Sacred Mosque, and the devout from Yemen were hindered from performing their religious duties.

Thus, I was filled with doubt and it would not be wrong to say that it became impossible to convince those whose opinion matters among the Arabs of anything else.

Despite my guiding them to peace and peaceful behaviour, and my calling the Arabs to peace and to taking up the stance of defence—the Government did not hesitate to announce that it had mobilized armies against the men of the Yemen such as they could not overcome, and that it would give to them an ample supply enough and ammunition to bring about our extermination.

They permitted them to burn the homes such as it was their habit of doing when dealing with the Muslim Arabs among their citizens, as distinct from non-Arabs. Equally they permitted mutilation, torture and caning of their citizens, which they were powerless to stand up against. This was the very thing it forbade itself in regard to its unsuspecting enemies, and it published proclamations to this effect, in particular about fair treatment and civilized conduct, in the beginning of its war with them.

When we heard about this we were forced to prepare to defend ourselves and we anticipated the judgement of God, when, surprisingly, other events caused them to turn away. So they preferred to return to the first treachery, the treachery of talking of peace as long as obstacles are absent and they have possibilities to accomplish their objectives.

At that time their messenger was sent to address us on this matter [who was] Shaykh Tawfīq, so we suggested to him to meet with Saʿīd Pasha. He informed us that he was his [Saʿīd Pasha's] authorized agent in this matter, and he had full authority. So, we said that we welcomed the sparing of bloodshed, on our original terms which were that the laws in our lands would be on the basis of the Islamic *sharīʿa*, with no separation between its civil and criminal codes, and so forth.

This natural Islamic right should be granted us in an official manner, that is the ordaining of good and the forbidding of evil, so that no selfish meddlesome official should have any say in our affairs, since we had undertaken what was our duty under the circumstances, because we established peace between the



tribes while the situation of the government remained unchanged.

So he left us, and we awaited the reply from the government and they mocked us and ignored us (may God deride them!). Thus, armies were prepared against us for the second time, two mighty expeditions possessing great strength—such as they announced—God is strongest in prowess and mightiest in giving exemplary punishment.

The two expeditions attacked at the same time, one from the north, consisting of a mighty number of effective troops, fully equipped and with its motorized vehicles, military leaders, with rapid firing guns and other long-range artillery, such as they published in the daily newspapers, and a large number of supporters of *sharīf* Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī under his leadership and that of his two sons, the divinely-protected.

It is well known to everybody what was published at that time, the state had equipped this joint army with provisions and ammunition enough to demolish all the Arab lands. The second of the two came from the south, from Jīzān, and all of this strong expedition consisted of the regular [Ottoman] army which was of great strength and size. They announced that these two field expeditions would join together and fall upon any people and lands which came their way.

We put our trust in God, besides whom we have no power and no strength, and we entrusted our matter to Him and said: 'How often a little company has overcome a numerous company, by God's leave! And God is with the patient' [K 2:249].

Truly, God's assistance helped us. To Him is the gratitude for the Arabs' bravery.

Nothing came out of these great announcements and many alarms which the likes of us, desert beduins, do not know the purpose of.

When strategy failed us and we were unable to arrive at a peaceful solution under which the fixed laws of God and His *sharīʿa* would be preserved, we were forced to defend ourselves and the beduins took a defensive stance.

And then, when the combat occurred with both of the armies, the northern and the southern, it became clear that all the thundering and lightning had been nothing and that all the rumours were like empty shells, since these two armies were shaken at

the confrontation (God helped us and prepared for them a mighty punishment).

The joint Northern army was afflicted by such reverses that much of its materials, provisions, supply and equipment fell into the hands of the Arabs.

The Honourable *sharīf* (may God bless him) was forced to pursue another plan, which consisted either of splitting kin-groups or certain other ways of influencing people in subtle ways.

In this way he was able to go in the direction of Abhā on a rough road, not much used, far from the usual way connecting Abhā and al-Qunfudha, the road which joins the beduin of the Yemen together.

He preferred it despite its length and its roughness, so he should not suffer any setback until he had entered Abhā by any method, as if his mission was nothing more than entering Abhā without meeting the Yemeni Arabs one more time.

He soon departed from it, and started on a third road, having with him a falcon covered with a black cloth, a road harder and rougher than the one he had come on, travelling in fear and watchfulness. He chose this rough and roundabout route, consisting many difficult mountain passes and with little water (the Baysha road); this road which goes east of al-Ṭāʾif in the direction of Najd, because this is the road of defeated fugitives and those who are fleeing.

I came to know that they were hiding the truth, and they started to claim that their entry (into Abhā) was by force, but we are wise Arabs and we are not concerned with the words of talkers when they are alone in remote lands.

We are men of deeds; we rely on God alone, sufficient for us is He, and a most excellent benefactor.

As for the southern army, it ended up with the battle of al-Ḥafāʾir. Do you know what the battle of al-Ḥafāʾir is?

It was that battle in which the Yemeni tribesmen took up the defence by the wells at al-Ḥafāʾir, three-quarters of an hour from Jizān. The regular government army barricaded itself at Jizān and the surrounding mountains, and they sheltered themselves in their citadels and forts and fixed their artillery on the mountains and the hills near the sea.

They were supported by their war-ships, and they started to

harass the beduins, by rapid-firing artillery from the sea and from the land. The beduin were steadfast, surrendering to the judgement of God, and then one Monday in the middle of Jumādā II 1329 [mid-June 1911]<sup>3</sup> the regular armed forces launched an attack with rapid artillery under the protection of artillery which was on the top of the hill and on the warships and in the forts. They performed all sorts of military stratagems.

The tribesmen had no power and no strength except in God most High and Mighty; He is with the steadfast, and they were firm. They remembered God much, and He fulfilled His promise to them, and they were victorious. The wrongdoers shall know the punishment which awaits them.

Yes, the beduin were steadfast and they defended the implementation of the fixed ordinances of religion. So, war continued against that mighty army until all of it perished except for an insignificant portion who were saved by fleeing. There were innumerable wounded, and into the beduins' hands fell guns, ammunition, equipment, artillery and machines which gave them power superior to their [the Ottomans'] power and strength for activity. He who knows the situation can assess it.

The remaining survivors of the two armies returned to Jizān. God imposed on them, and on those who came to their help, wind, armies of the air<sup>4</sup> and plague-like diseases which swept away the survivors and the helpers except for an insignificant few. They were finally forced to return to Jizān, and they rested. God has everything in His hands and He has power over everything.

After all this, it was not long before a letter with proposals of peace arrived for us from his excellency the *wālī* of ʿAsīr, dated before the beginning of the recent events with the Italians.

We executed God's orders, we relied on Him and put our trust in Him.

We sent a messenger to his excellency, one of the leading beduins, to address him with regard to the request.

We provided that messenger with every peaceful proposal,

3 The exact date for the battle at al-Hafāʾir is 13 June 1911; al-Shahhārī, *al-Muḏāmiʿ al-tawassuʿiyya*, 57-8.

4 It is uncertain what is meant by this. Most likely the expression refers to locusts or some disease-bearing insect.

and we sent a letter with him, expressing our objectives and desires for unity and unanimity, that we wanted to be brothers and helpers for the truth.

On the way, in the vicinity of Abhā, it reached the ears of that messenger that the *wālī* was only planning a deceit, and that he had laid a murderous snare for him.

So, he remained outside of the city where he was safe. He [the messenger] sent a letter to him [the *wālī*] and informed him that he had come, heeding the call for peace, and that he wanted to discuss that, in order to know how the matter would end. God grants success.

His [the *wālī*'s] answer was just to send him [the messenger] a long, extensive message, filled with arrogance, conceit and haughtiness, and not a word of it was without threat and menace and rejection of the agreement. Here is some of what was stated in it, word by word:

'I have received a letter from Ḥusayn Effendi, and in it he states that you have asked for a clarification of conditions with the government, and their modality. I was surprised by this request. This situation causes suspicion to be deep-rooted, and the events which take place now with the infidels' suits your purposes. So, no conditions are necessary. What conditions should there be between the government and its citizens? The duty of the citizens is to obey the government and its orders.

We intended, trusting in God, to send a military campaign to crush the rebels and insurgents with force, and to pardon to the obedient and to grant them safe conduct.

Our request for a unified 'Asīr was not out of weakness or seeking help from them.

The force, which exceeds 50 battalions gathered in al-Zaydiyya, al-Zuhra and al-Luḥayya. We have with us 17 battalions, and that is enough for every enemy in the Yemen and 'Asīr in the interior and the exterior and you know it. In addition you can assess the outcome of rebellion and uprising, etc. etc.'

We have received this message and other messages sent from some of the officials of the government to the Arabs, and in them was more than that [more threats etc.].

5 The *wālī* here refers to the outbreak of the Turkish-Italian war of 1911-12.

It should be clear to the reader how intense is our regret over the fact that the government officials are of this type. They are the ones who cause the unrest, and whenever it approaches an end they stir it up again. [We also regret] that they always constitute a stumbling block in the way of quelling the unrest—as explained before—especially in such circumstances and such critical times.

May God guide them or give us another people in their place, and may they not be like them.

What does the fair-minded man understand from all this, except that we always work for peace, while the state officials work to destroy the state's foundations. We work for reform, and those deviant ones work to undermine it. We work for the implementation of the pure *sharī'a*, and they work to abolish it and eliminate all traces of it.

What is this calamity, by which God tested the state and the *umma*, by placing it in the hands of this group which seeks to topple it and cause it to fall into a bottomless pit.

How could you have faith, after this, in an evildoer of the same kind as these wicked ones, who purchase their life in this world with their afterlife and block the way of God. They do these deeds to the beduins, and they rush to pour threatening words upon them.

They know the pride and self-esteem of the beduin, and that they will not be content with disgraceful things—in particular when they have the upper hand and have so far been victorious.

They thereby bring victory to God and His messenger, and they persist in the quest for the implementation of the pure *sharī'a* and its restrictions.

They [the beduins] are not doing anything of that which the Turks do. The Arabs perform prayer, give *zakāt* and fast during Ramaḍān, and they observe the commands and heed the prohibitions as far as they are able. Whereas they [the Turks] do none of this. On the contrary you see them turning the mosques into barracks for their soldiers, hospitals for their sick, and into locations for their immoralities and for their games and merriment. Their leaders often enter the mosques together with their dogs, in front of the very eyes of the humble beduin. They perform other godless acts, which I do not have the time to relate here.

The beduin help God and His messenger, and they do not harm anyone, except for in the sake of God and in the quest to work for the Book of God and the Sunna of His prophet (may God bless him and grant him peace) and for the manifestation of the light of God.

At the same time these others want to extinguish the light of God with their mouths [presumably; with their talk]. God will that His light shine—even though the infidels dislike it. I wish I knew what is required of us and of the Arabs after this!

Should we surrender ourselves to this force which the *wālī* described, and sit and wait until they burn the remainder of our houses, confiscate the rest of Arab property, slaughter our sons and violate our women? (As they promised us in Jīzān. God turned their own plot against them and inflicted upon them an evil fortune.)

Or should we hand ourselves over to them and renounce our religion, our worldly life and the hereafter?

Or should we help them to restore the situation to what it was, and wait until God designates for some of those in power who will buy us like some piece of scrap, just like they bought others from Arab lands, like in Tripoli, according to what I have heard?

If we did so, we would in their eyes be the greatest of people and the most excellent of men, whom they reward with a share in their profit. God will give extensive hardships, and he will pour upon us and them an agony which the believers know.

I think every aware Muslim, who wishes well for Islam and for the Muslims, will say that it is our duty to make preparations for defence and not to subject ourselves to jeopardy. Particularly after they set in motion all their armies, from the north and the south with the purpose of attacking us, in the manner the Pasha described in his former letter.

‘But it may be that God will bring thee victory, or some commandment from Him, and then they will find themselves, for that which they kept secret within them, remorseful’ [K 5:52]. ‘O believers, if you help God he will help you, and confirm your feet’ [K 47:7]. ‘But as for the unbelievers, ill chance shall befall them! He will send their works astray’ [K 47:8]. ‘That is because those who disbelieve follow falsehood, and those who

believe follow the truth from their Lord. Even so God strikes similitudes for men' [K 47:3].

The reader will be surprised that this army moving to attack us and their helpers announced what they announced. Nevertheless, they deceived us when they encouraged men, sometimes from their helpers and sometimes our friends, to send private letters to us, requesting a truce with the state. This without there being any sign in these letters of any government officials (even the least of them) having an apparent hand in them.

Despite that, though I uncovered the tricks and knew about the deceit, I kept on answering these letters welcoming the saving of bloodshed, based on practising the noble *sharī'a* and the implementation of the punishments of the *sharī'a*. That was a lump in their throat and a mote in their eyes. I would remind whoever wrote to me that before the actual bloodshed between the Arabs and the Turks and before the occurrence of the successive Arab victories, I was in favour of peace, making its basic condition the practice of the *sharī'a* and implementation of the punishments of the *sharī'a*. I am surprised because I have not found a way to correspond with the state in a serious way now, so long as its officials behave in the way described above.

Perhaps honourable readers who wish to observe the faith after this will wonder about what would guarantee observance of agreements and non-violation of them, such as before. [The reader will also wonder] about how we could be convinced that such a thing would come about—were it to be that its implementation be imposed by the word of state officials of position and influence whose own aim was treachery. We leave the answer to this to our clever and knowledgeable brothers in the faith. These are some of our matters which we have summed up clearly for you: whoever of our friends comes to us, after a difficult journey on rough roads, he knows what we are doing in our desert; establishing the rituals of religion and regular security to such an extent that one could almost believe that if a man left any of his possessions or goods on the public roads, no one would touch them and no one would covet them.

I need not describe the performance of prayers, Friday and communal prayers, and the remaining rituals of religion that follows from there, devoid of innovation and far from lies and

paths of evil. Being in such a state, how can it enter the mind of a sensible person or circulate in the hearts of man, that which I have heard that they allege; that I am an evil hand manipulating wickedness and perhaps being manœuvred by a foreign power. I think that no sensible person could possibly imagine that.

I, however, think that the other states are fully aware that the Arabs are the strongest people in their religion (in particular the Yemeni Arabs) and that nothing unites them more than defence of the heart of the religion, honour and the Arab lands, as is well known. Those lands [the Arab lands] are filled with deserts, wildernesses and mountains. No one can expect to reap any harvest from them, that would justify the opening of a door which would cause much damage to them and which concerns Islam and the Muslims in the east and west, and which is one of the most special of their vital religious affairs,—that is the door of mockery of the legacy of the Messenger of God (may God bless him and grant him peace) and the two Caliphs who succeeded after him (may God be pleased with them both). This door touches one of the most important questions, about which there are many doubts and upon which many eyes are open. God is not unmindful of the acts of the oppressors.

Finally we beg God to set matters right and grant us success in all that is good and help us eliminate the germs of immorality and protect us from the sin of evildoers and cause us to be obedient. 'So loose not heart, nor fall into despair; for you must gain mastery if you are believers' [K 3:139].

Written 6 Rabīʿ II 1330 [25 March 1912]

Signed

Muḥammad ʿAlī al-Idrīsī



## C

### THE WRITINGS OF MUḤAMMAD AL-IDRĪSĪ

Compiled from listings by:

Abū Dāḥish, ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad Ḥusayn, *Al-Ḥayāt al-fikriyya wa’l-adabiyya fī junūb al-bilād al-‘Arabiyya*, Riyāḍ, 1982.

al-‘Aqīlī, Muḥammad b. Aḥmad, *Ta’rīkh al-Mikhlāf al-Sulaymānī*, II, 2nd revised edn, Riyāḍ 1982. Unpublished material given by al-‘Aqīlī is reproduced below.

Ibrāhīm, Yaḥyā Muḥammad, *Madrasat Aḥmad b. Idrīs wa-atharuhā fī ‘l-Sudān*, Bayrūt 1993.

O’Fahey, R.S., *et alii*, *Arabic Literature of Africa. I, The Writings of Eastern Sudanic Africa to c. 1900*, Leiden 1994.

#### *Religious and political writings and poetry*

1. *Āyāt karīma wa-mawā‘iz fakhīma*  
MS: Rome (Ministero), 10044/10(h). Photocopy in Bergen.  
A collection of Koranic verses and religious exhortations.
2. *Bayān li’l-nās wa-hudā wa-maw‘iza li’l-muttaqīn*  
Published in Cairo, 1330/1912.  
The document is partially reproduced in al-‘Aqīlī, *Ta’rīkh al-Mikhlāf al-Sulaymānī*, II, 769-79, and in Farūq ‘Uthmān Abāza, *Al-Ḥukm al-‘Uthmānī fī ‘l-Yaman*, Beirut, 1979, 466-74 (See Appendix B).  
Completed 6 Rabī‘ II 1330/25 March 1912. A description of the state of affairs and a justification of the ongoing rebellion against the Ottomans in ‘Asīr.
3. *Daf‘ al-i’tirāḍ ‘an sīrat shifā’ al-amrāḍ*  
Listed by Yaḥyā Muḥammad Ibrāhīm, 300. No further information.
4. *Manshūr* dated 11 Jumādā I, 1327/ 31 May 1909.  
Reproduced in al-‘Aqīlī, *Ta’rīkh*, 766-8. This is the earliest document we have from the Idrīsī state.

Contains a justification of the activities of Muḥammad al-Idrīsī; much the same arguments as in the later *Bayān*. The *manshūr* has an appendix where al-Idrīsī justifies his cutting off the hands of Aḥmad al-Sharīf al-Khawājī.

5. *Qaṣā'id*

A collection of poems on Ibn Idrīs.

A brief discussion with quotations is given in Yaḥyā Muḥammad Ibrāhīm, *Madrasa*, 301.

Some of the poems are quoted in Abū Dāhish, *Al-Ḥayāt al-fikriyya*, 321-3 and 327-40.

6. *Qaṣīda*

A poem which Muḥammad al-Idrīsī sent from Egypt to his father 'Alī b. Muḥammad in Ṣabyā.

Reproduced in al-'Aqīlī, *Ta'rīkh al-Mikhlāf al-Sulaymānī*, 809.

7. *Qaṣīda*

A poem which Muḥammad al-Idrīsī sent from Egypt to his shaykh in Ṣabyā, Sālim b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān Bāṣuhī.

Reproduced in al-'Aqīlī, *ibid.*, 810-11.

8. *Risālat al-awrād al-Idrīsīyya*

Published Cairo: Dār al-Qur'ān 1978, 82 pp., ed. Ṣāliḥ al-Ja'farī.

Analysis in Yaḥyā Muḥammad Ibrāhīm, *Madrasa*, 301-4.

Includes a commentary on the *awrād* and *aḥzāb* of Ibn Idrīs.

9. *Risāla fī taḥqīq manāqib al-sayyid Aḥmad ibn Idrīs*

MS: Al-Zayniyya, Luxor. Published in Ṣāliḥ al-Ja'farī (ed.), *al-Muntaqā al-naḥs fī manāqib ... al-sayyid Aḥmad ibn Idrīs*, Cairo 1380/1960, 7-38.

A compilation of materials, some otherwise no longer extant, for a life of Ibn Idrīs. Completed 24 Sha'bān 1321/26 November 1903.

10. *al-Ṭarīqa al-marḍīyya ilā ma'rīfat al-ṭarīqa al-Idrīsīyya*

This work is discussed by Yaḥyā Muḥammad Ibrāhīm, *Madrasa*, 301, who suggests that it may be the same work as the *Risālat al-awrād*.

*The letters of Muḥammad al-Idrīsī*

All reproduced in al-<sup>c</sup>Aqīlī, *Taʾrīkh al-Mikhhlāf al-Sulaymān*, II, page numbers to this reference in [brackets] after each letter

- a. *Letter to Muṣṭafā b. Muḥammad al-Nuʿmī of the Rīḍ al Mā<sup>c</sup>*  
Dated Rabī<sup>c</sup> II, 1328/April 1910 [783-4].
- b. *Letter to Muṣṭafā b. Muḥammad al-Nuʿmī of the Rīḍ al Mā<sup>c</sup>*  
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- c. *Letter to Muṣṭafā b. Muḥammad al-Nuʿmī of the Rīḍ al Mā<sup>c</sup>*  
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Dated 25 Jumādā II 1329/23 June 1911 [790-3]
- e. *Letter to Muṣṭafā b. Muḥammad al-Nuʿmī of the Rīḍ al Mā<sup>c</sup>*  
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- f. *Letter to Muṣṭafā b. Muḥammad al-Nuʿmī of the Rīḍ al Mā<sup>c</sup>*  
Dated Rabī<sup>c</sup> I 1341/22 October 1922 [801].
- g. *Letter to Muḥammad Ṭahīr Riḍwān*  
Dated 23 Rabī<sup>c</sup> II 1341/12 December 1922 [805].
- h. *Letter to Muḥammad Ṭahīr Riḍwān*  
Dated 28 Rabī<sup>c</sup> II 1341/17 December 1922 [806].
- i. *Order issued to the shaykhs of Banū Shabīl*  
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- j. *Manshūr to the Banū Mughayd in ʿAsīr al-Sarāh*  
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- k. *Letter to the qāḍī in the Jabal al-Naẓīr, Muṭahhar b. ʿAbd Allāh*  
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- l. *Order issued to the shaykhs of Banū Ḥamd*  
Dated 21 Dhū 'l-Ḥijja 1329/12 december 1911 [799].
- m. *Order issued to the shaykhs of Banū Shabīl*  
Dated 24 Dhū 'l-Ḥijja 1329/15 december 1911 [800].

Contains a justification of the activities of Muḥammad al-Idrīsī; much the same arguments as in the later *Bayān*. The *manshūr* has an appendix where al-Idrīsī justifies his cutting off the hands of Aḥmad al-Sharīf al-Khawājī.

5. *Qaṣā'id*

A collection of poems on Ibn Idrīs.

A brief discussion with quotations is given in Yaḥyā Muḥammad Ibrāhīm, *Madrasa*, 301.

Some of the poems are quoted in Abū Dāhish, *Al-Ḥayāt al-fikriyya*, 321-3 and 327-40.

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*The letters of Muhammad al-Idrīsī*

All reproduced in al-<sup>c</sup>Aqilī, *Ta'rikh al-Mikhlaḥ al-Sulaymānī*, II, page numbers to this reference in [brackets] after each letter.

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*Sāmiṭa*  
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